“DISPROPORTIONS WITH SUPERFLUOUS HAND”: GENDER AND SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY IN *PARADISE LOST*

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“DISPROPORTIONS WITH SUPERFLUOUS HAND”: GENDER AND SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY IN *PARADISE LOST*

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ABSTRACT

My thesis explores the interconnected topics of gender dynamics and scientific inquiry in Milton's *Paradise Lost,* showing that Milton's text remains culturally relevant outside of the literary tradition. Curiosity about nature is an important characteristic of prelapsarian Eden, offering opportunity for discovery and for error, and inquiry into the natural world is continually connected to social and ethical disruption in the text. Adam's uncertainty about his position of authority over Eve parallels his observations of disproportions in the heavens, and Satan's temptation of Eve uses the language of the new science to confirm the connection between natural philosophy and social disruption, revealing the potential impact of natural philosophy on social structures. Rather than offering easy answers or total harmony in his prelapsarian world, Milton's epic challenges readers to think carefully about the social dynamics of knowledge attainment and the ethical implications for our ideas of nonhuman and human matter.

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INTRODUCTION

History and Summary of Paradise Lost

In his 1641 polemical tract, *The Reason of Church Government Urged against Prelaty,* Milton famously takes on the stance of a poet using but his "left hand" in the writing of prose, a sad necessity of his politically corrupt era (88). [1] In the same tract, he also writes of an early hope, after the favorable reception of his early poems, that he "might perhaps leave something so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let it die" (88). Even if such a statement serves primarily as a rhetorical stance, Milton seems to have achieved his goal of producing a lasting poetic work with *Paradise Lost,* published in 1667. Though, of course, it is not his only surviving work, it is likely the one with the longest and most continuous critical history. Milton dedicated much of the 1640s and 1650s to writing prose polemical tracts in support of the English Revolution and against the monarchy and the Anglican prelacy. He additionally penned a series of tracts in defense of divorce and a famous anti-licensing pamphlet, *Areopagitica,* which is often considered an early defense of free speech (Lewalski 190–197). *Paradise Lost* was published after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. The twelve-book blank verse epic was Milton's first poetic publication after a collection of early poems published in 1646, and it was certainly his most expansive and ambitious poetic project to date (Lewalski 442).

MLA Handbook, 8th edition

[1]References to Milton's prose works come from *John Milton: Prose,* edited by David Loewenstein, unless otherwise noted.

Paradise Lost re-tells and significantly expands the story of the Fall of mankind recounted in Genesis. It begins with the fall of Satan and demons in Book I, includes the rebellion of the angels and the creation of mankind, and ends with a prophetic vision from Michael to Adam in Book XII. Milton's epic is winding, chronologically out of order, and often mediated by storytellers. Certain events in *Paradise Lost* are recounted more than once, sometimes in conflicting ways. For instance, Eve recounts her own creation in Book IV, and then Adam famously tells Raphael the story of her creation again in Book VIII, quite differently. Uriel recounts the creation of the Earth to a disguised Satan in Book III, and then Raphael tells the story of the creation to Adam and Eve in much more detail in Book VII. Books V through VIII consist primarily of discussions between the archangel Raphael and Adam, although Eve is also present until Book VIII. In these books Raphael tells the story of the fall of the angels and the creation of the world. My thesis deals primarily with their discourse in Book VIII. Here the angel and Adam discuss astronomy, Adam's creation, and Adam's relationship with Eve.

Critical Framework and Outline

These multiple narratives have caused Peter C. Herman to argue that Milton's text holds conflicting viewpoints in productive tension, although critics in the past have attempted to unify the text despite itself. Herman calls for an era of critical response that chooses to embrace the tensions and uncertainties inherent in Milton's "poetics of incertitude" (Herman 15). I work within the framework set up by Herman to argue for Milton's exploratory attitude in *Paradise Lost* to the matter that makes up the universe and the relationship of human beings to that matter, a relationship that ultimately rests in uncertainty. While many eco-

minded critics have read Milton as portraying prelapsarian Adam and Eve in near-perfect sympathy with the natural world, Adam and Eve, in fact, encounter and navigate many uncertainties about the nature of their universe and the nature of their relationship with each other. Paradise provides opportunity for natural philosophical inquiry, even mistaken or misguided inquiry, enabling Adam and Eve to interrogate their place in the cosmos, their position in their own gendered social hierarchy, and their relationship and responsibility to each other and other creatures.

My project is divided into three chapters. The first chapter sets up Adam's inquiry into natural philosophy, his alienation from certain aspects of God's universe, and his uncertainty about the natural world and the hierarchies that exist within it; the second chapter brings these ideas closer to Earth by examining the impact of this uncertainty in relation to the gendered hierarchy in Paradise from Adam's perspective; the third chapter examines the role of natural philosophical inquiry and Adam and Eve's uncertain relationship to each other in the fall of humankind. My first chapter is primarily a close reading of Raphael and Adam's discussion on the design of the universe in Book VIII. Adam asks Raphael about a disproportion he observes in the heavens, and Raphael responds with the famous admonition to "be lowly wise" (8.173). I use the twenty-first-century philosophy of New Materialism as an initial framework through which to examine the potential social and ethical implications of Adam and Eve's alienation from the heavenly bodies. Raphael fails to fully answer Adam's question about the disproportions in the heavens, and Adam extends the issue of disproportion into the social realm in the second half of Book VIII. My second chapter relates primarily to this extension and Adam's uncertainty about his own hierarchical

position over Eve, which results from his concern that hierarchical social orders, like natural orders, are not discernibly based on essential superiority or inferiority. The third chapter examines the separation scene between Adam and Eve and the temptation of Adam and Eve in Book IX, both of which showcase the uncertainty of their positions in the Garden, and the role of natural philosophy in the first humans' respective falls.

The History of Science and the Role of Matter

Paradise Lost, as previously stated, was written in an era of intense political changes; the monarchy had been restored for less than a decade by the time it was published, and the restoration itself was an event that Milton fought against for as long as possible (Lewalski 375). However, the seventeenth century was also an extraordinary time in scientific and natural philosophic history, which would later be known as the Scientific Revolution. At the time, the "new science," which was characterized by inductive experimental methods, existed alongside other iterations of natural philosophy, which tended to be based on deductive reasoning from universal truths.[2] As Bruce Moran notes in his historical work *Distilling Knowledge,* the story of the scientific revolution is characterized by "an animated muddle of belief, disillusion, and reinterpretation that is all part of negotiating what there is to talk about in the structure of nature, and how best to learn more about it" (Moran 7). Other historians of science, including Charles Webster and Andrew Wear, also note that new ideas about the natural world were developing rapidly and challenging previous conceptions of natural philosophy and science, which "laid claims to be the foundations of knowledge and

[2] For clarity, I use the terms "new philosophy," "new science," and "experimental philosophy" virtually interchangeably; the realms of natural philosophy and experimental science were not strictly divided, and the new science was considered a realm of natural philosophy.

objectivity," thus impacting the foundations of other disciplines, like medicine (Wear 362). By the time Milton wrote *Paradise Lost,* Francis Bacon's groundbreaking work in the new philosophy, *The Great Instauration,* had been published for almost fifty years (Moran 131), and the Royal Society was formed less than a decade earlier (Webster 488). The scientific revolution had begun, but many competing ways of obtaining knowledge were still prevalent.

Furthermore, natural philosophy, metaphysics, and social and political discourses were integrally intertwined. Charles Webster's *The Great Instauration: Science, Medicine and Reform,* showcases how deeply Francis Bacon's writings leaned towards and were appropriated by millenarian theology, becoming entwined in calls for religious reform and revolutionary ideology broadly in England. Webster posits that Bacon "became the most important philosophical and scientific authority of the Puritan Revolution" (25). Webster's analysis reveals the extent to which natural philosophical discourse was entrenched in social and theological issues. Milton's interaction with scientific discourse was very much grounded in his time, and *Paradise Lost* reveals his skepticism of claims of an apolitical and non-disruptive conception of knowledge. Milton portrays a natural philosophy that affects social and hierarchical structures because it has the power to make people rethink their own position within the natural world and, thus, in relation to each other. The uncertainty and variability within natural philosophical discourse in Milton's time impacts how Milton frames Adam and Eve's conception of their own place in a fundamentally strange and uncertain universe, one that is open to misinterpretation and misapplication even before the Fall. Furthermore, the uncertainty in Adam and Eve's relationship with the universe has

profound effects on the Edenic social hierarchy, which is disrupted and ultimately uprooted, partially as a result of scientific inquiry.

Literature Review

It is with the connection between social disruption and inquiry into natural philosophy in mind that I chose secondary sources. After three hundred years of critical commentary on *Paradise Lost,* my options for potential secondary sources were overwhelmingly numerous. Primarily, the sources I chose to focus on cover Milton's philosophy of matter and Milton's depiction of gender relations in Paradise. Biographical details about Milton come from Barbara Lewalski's *The Life of John Milton,* which has become the standard biography since its publication in 2001. The seminal works regarding Milton's natural philosophy and his conception of matter are *The Matter of Revolution: Science, Poetry, and Politics in the Age of Milton* by John Rogers and *Milton among the Philosophers: Poetry and Materialism in Seventeenth-Century England* by Stephen Fallon. I also rely heavily on chapter five of Shannon Miller's *Engendering the Fall: John Milton and Seventeenth-Century Women Writers,* which reads *Paradise Lost* in context with Margaret Cavendish's *Blazing World* to showcase Milton's use of gender to challenge the Royal Society's claims of apolitical notion knowledge. Rogers reads Milton's works in the context of the "Vitalist Moment" of the seventeenth century, a time period when poetry, politics, and the figurations of natural and scientific systems were integrally intertwined (Rogers 3). Disruptions in one area constituted disruptions in others, and revolutionary political thought that tended to decenter political authority away from a monarchical head corresponded to scientific theories that oriented vital

functions away from singular or central organs. (For example, William Harvey's theory of the circulation of the blood decentered the heart in the body.)

Stephen Fallon's work has less to do with scientific discourse and more to do with Milton's metaphysics, although the two cannot be neatly separated. Fallon puts Milton's philosophy in conversation with the seventeenth-century mechanistic debate, which had dramatic implications for theology and politics. According to Fallon, Milton's monism allowed him to avoid the mechanism of both Descartes and Hobbes (80–81). Descartes advocated for a radical dualism between mechanistic, corporeal, and extended body, which takes up space, and incorporeal spirit, which is not extended and does not take up space. The two substances are totally independent in Descartes's metaphysics. In contrast Hobbes argued for a monist mechanism, in which body and spirit/thought are both mechanical and everything in the universe can be measured and understood according to mechanical laws. In Hobbes' metaphysics, "living bodies and machines differ only because nature makes one and man another" (Fallon 33). Both Descartes and Hobbes advocated for a mechanical universe as a basis for natural philosophical inquiry. In contrast, Fallon aligns Milton's beliefs with the relatively obscure philosopher Anne Conway, a monist and an animist materialist who argues that there is no division between the matter making up the soul and body. Like Conway, Milton believes matter, and everything made up of it, is "vital," or alive, allowing Milton to avoid Descartes and Hobbes's mechanism completely (Fallon 117).

Fallon's work helped to establish Milton's monism as critical consensus, and it plays a major role in ecocritical readings of Milton's monism by authors such as Leah S. Marcus, Diane McColley, and Julia Cummins, who generally argue that monism serves to collapse

traditional divisions between Adam and Eve and the natural world. Milton's monism is often used to argue for the continuity and sympathy between Adam and Eve and the prelapsarian cosmos they inhabit. Milton's *De Doctrina Christiana,* which was being written concurrently with *Paradise Lost,* leaves little doubt Milton opposed Cartesian mind/body dualism and Hobbesian mechanistic monism, but Fallon's work has been complicated by critics such as P.J. Donnelly and N.K Sugimura, who argue that Fallon potentially extrapolates too much from *De Doctrina*. I argue Milton's conception of matter and his monism in *Paradise Lost* are exploratory, and he emphasizes the interactivity of matter at times and the recalcitrance of matter at others, as my first chapter shows. Prelapsarian Adam and Eve are certainly presented as more in tune with the natural world, but difference and uncertainty about nature are also vital parts of Adam and Eve's experience.

The critical debate around gender in *Paradise Lost* has been lively since about 1970. Early feminist critics in the 1970s and the 1980s tended to focus on critiquing Milton and exposing the misogyny of his portrayal of Eve and her subordination to Adam. In their seminal work on the female literary tradition, *The Madwoman in the Attic,* Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar portray Milton as a patriarchal bogey whose representation of Eve continues to haunt women writers. In "When Eve Reads Milton: Undoing the Canonical Economy," Christine Froula reads Eve as "the image of the idealized and objectified woman whose belief in her role underwrites patriarchal power" (329). Far from being the critical consensus, however, Milton's misogyny and masculinism has become increasingly debated, with many critics tending to focus on the positive aspects of Milton's portrayal of Eve. Barbara Lewalski's article "Milton on Women—Yet Once More," written in 1974,

constitutes an early example of such a defense of Milton. Joseph Wittreich's *Feminist Milton* and Diane McColley's *Milton's Eve* are both examples of books written in the 1980s that attempt to nuance the portrait of Milton as a misogynist, focusing on Milton's portrayal of an eminently rational and perhaps even superior Eve. The topic of Adam and Eve's relationship and whether it is characterized primarily by mutuality and reciprocity or hierarchy and subservience continues to be current, as evidenced by Allison Bare's 2018 article, in which she challenges feminist critics to be more strongly critical of the sexual inequalities underpinning gender relations in *Paradise Lost.* Other recent secondary sources I rely on to inform my opinions on the depiction of gender include Kristin Pruitt's *Gender and the Power of Relationship,* Peter C. Herman's analysis of Adam and Eve's relationship in *Destabilizing Milton,* and John Rogers' essay "Transported Touch" in the collection *Milton and Gender,* edited by Catherine Gimelli Martin.

While these secondary and primary sources have illuminated Milton studies for me, my thesis uniquely reveals and reconsiders the interconnectivity of questions of Milton's natural philosophy, his monism, and gender relations in *Paradise Lost.* Rather than portraying a world wholly characterized by monistic unity, Milton creates a Paradise in which Adam and Eve must navigate relatively wide ontological differences between themselves and other living and nonliving entities. Their Paradise is characterized by uncertainty which is then filled in by natural philosophical inquiries and rhetoric, which in turn disrupts the social and gendered hierarchy, itself characterized by uncertainty, eventually contributing to their Fall. Thus, these discourses come together in Milton's project to explain how Adam and Eve, presumably perfect people in a perfect world, are able to fall.

CHAPTER ONE

Critics have long noted Milton's monism and his vitalist materialism, as outlined in *De Doctrina Christiana.* Because everything in the universe is created from God's own original material, everything is vitally alive and connected in a way that challenges the strict separation between corporeal and incorporeal matter, body and mind. Milton's monism and his vitalist materialism are often read in conjunction with his depiction of matter in *Paradise Lost,* prompting some to draw parallels between Milton's supposed vitalism and modern-day New Materialism. For instance, in their introduction to the edited collection of essays *Milton, Materialism, and Embodiment,* Kevin J. Donovan and Thomas Festa make connections between the two, writing, "Early modern vitalism, therefore, may be said to possess a special resonance with current theoretical and political concerns" (2). Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* outlines the philosophy of New Materialism. In it, Bennett emphasizes the independent agentic potential of nonhuman objects, so that "agentic capacity is now seen as differentially distributed across a wider range of ontological types," collapsing differences between the human and nonhuman and the living and nonliving (9). This philosophy emphasizes that "all bodies are kin in the sense of inextricably enmeshed in a dense network of relations" (Bennett 13).

The power of Milton's monism to collapse hierarchical distinctions may be overstated, however. Milton presents humans' relationships with other material entities in contradictory ways, emphasizing the alien status of other bodies of material at some points in the text and the continuity between all matter—whether corporeal or incorporeal—in others. Adam and Raphael's discussion in Book VIII on the arrangement of the heavens brings

attention to the inscrutability and mystery of humanity's distinctly hierarchical relationship with heavenly bodies, even in a prelapsarian setting. Rather than taking part in a unified cosmos, Adam and Eve exist in a stratified and unfamiliar one. Thus, Milton leaves space within his poem for a fundamentally strange and recalcitrant form of matter. In doing so, he reveals the limits of Adam and Eve's sympathetic relationship with the natural world. This ultimately contributes to a rich and complex—though less than straightforward—depiction of the first humans in their natural environment, a depiction that does seemingly anticipate modern concerns about our place in the world even as it is fundamentally grounded in the philosophical, scientific, and theological discourse of its day.

To begin to discuss Milton's ideas on material and matter first requires a clarification on terminology, particularly on the words "matter," "material," "body." *Materia prima* is the primordial matter from which everything is derived.[3] Milton's opinions on matter are most clearly espoused in his *De Doctrina Christiana,* a posthumously published philosophical tract. Although everything may start out as made from "prime matter," "individual beings, whether corporeal (bodily) or spiritual (insensible) are differentiated out of the potential of matter" through form, creating ontological differences, and assuring that "a given being is not reducible to prime matter" (Donnelly 4). In this way, perfect and incorruptible matter, which is from God Himself, becomes mutable and capable of sin. This is not to say that Milton considered incorporeal and corporeal matter to be radically separated from each other in the Cartesian sense, but throughout *Paradise Lost,* he depicts the two as functionally

[3] While Fallon, Rogers, and others use the terms interchangeably, P.J. Donnelly accuses Stephen Fallon of conflating "matter" and "body": "All forms consist of 'matter,' but that does not necessitate that forms are corporeal (sensible) unless the equation between matter and body is already (incorrectly) assumed" (2).

different enough as to fall into ontologically different categories. Thus, "matter" is the primordial substance, and everything contains it. "Material" and "body," in my usage, are interchangeable, referring to corporeal derivations of matter in particular. Some of the points I make about material will have implications for how *matter,* that which makes up the whole universe, interacts in all forms. For instance, by exploring the gap between Adam and Eve and the larger universe, I am technically only discussing corporeal forms, but I am putting into question the continuity of matter as a whole.

Although comparisons between Milton's philosophy and New Materialism must be limited by the hundred-year time period between them, it is useful to consider their shared concern with the ethical and ecological implications of human relationship with material objects. In *Vibrant Matter,* Bennett describes the shared vibrancy of the universe as characterized by "a strange and incomplete commonality," and the goal of New Materialism is to focus on the "commonality" rather than the "strange and incomplete" (114). Her first chapter establishes the philosophic tradition centered around the recalcitrance and "impossibility of 'reconcilement'" between people and nonhuman objects (14). Presented this way, the issue of matter is not deciding whether it is interactive and continuous or strange and recalcitrant; it is rather choosing which to accept as "the starting point of ethics," with both having different ecological implications (14).[4] Unlike Bennett, who chooses to focus exclusively on the connectivity of matter for the remainder of her book, Milton

[4] Bennett uses "matter" and "material" (what Milton might call corporeal) interchangeably, as evidenced by her discussion on Aristotle's *materia prima,* which she refers to as "mechanical matter" (56). While she goes on to recognize the hylomorphic model as a kind of vitalism, she criticizes it for presenting material as inert and passive unless acted on by an external force, perhaps eliding some of the difference between matter and material/corporeal that I try to preserve. In this paragraph, though, I use Bennett's phrasing.

continues to present multiple and conflicting narratives of the continuity of matter and the material entities that come out of it, engaging in Peter C. Herman's "poetics of incertitude" (21). In doing so, he captures humanity's paradoxical relationship with matter, a relationship that continues to have important implications for how humans build their social structures and interact with the world around them.

Milton and Bennett are connected by their concern with the ethical implications for human conceptions of material, even apparently nonliving material. But it is important to note that Milton's depictions of other material objects are identifiable with modern concerns without necessarily being anticipatory of them. The "ethical implications" of the status of matter, both with and without form, are different because of differing contexts and cultural commitments. Bennett's vitalism interacts necessarily with the specific ecological understandings and anxieties of the Anthropocene in a way that Milton's vitalism cannot. The ideas about the nature of the heavens in Book VIII engage instead with the philosophical and scientific debate of the seventeenth century, a debate that was also entrenched in theology and politics. *Paradise Lost* was written during what John Rogers calls the "Vitalist Moment" in a "culture that demanded the construction of theories of agency and organization that could be seen to hold true for all facets of human and natural existence" (3).[5] It is fair to

[5] Rogers argues for a brief explosion of vitalist natural philosophy, partially in response to political events—a claim I agree with fundamentally—but this term is a bit misleading in its attempt to make the seventeenth-century's interest in vitalism unique. Alchemy and much of the natural philosophy that preceded the seventeenth century, including that of Paracelsus depended on notions of prime, or original, matter, of a "cosmic soul," and of a mysterious force which animates and connects the universe in a way that anticipates the vitalism of later seventeenth-century natural philosophers like Glisson, Harvey, and Van Helmont, whom Rogers compares to Milton. Furthermore, vitalism was prominent and politically relevant in the eighteenth century as well as the seventeenth, as noted by Catherine Packham. Vitalism in some form could even be said to be alive and well today in the New Materialist works of Jane Bennett, Bruno Latour, and others which are themselves a response to the impending and increasingly inevitable eco-apocalypse.

say, then, that the way that Milton presents the ontology of matter itself as well as its organization has wider implications for the first humans and for the philosophy and theology of the poem itself. The interaction between these various and yet interconnected discourses helps to account for the hierarchical and social thrust of Adam's question in Book VIII and his concern that "nobler bodies" may be serving those that are less noble (8.27).

Critical attention has largely focused on Milton's presentation of a materially connected prelapsarian universe, characterized by a unifying "first matter." The social effect of such an outlook serves to collapse hierarchies, both between human individuals and between humans and the natural world. Milton seems to make his monism and his animist materialism clear in *De Doctrina Christiana,* where he writes that at creation "all these things were made, not out of nothing, but out of matter" (502). Since nothing can exist before God or independent of His will, and God could not have created *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), "all things are of God" (502). Matter is perfect, but in creation it "received embellishment from the accession of forms, which are themselves material" (503). While Milton's conceptions of "matter" and "form" as the basic model for all sensible things resembles Aristotle's hylomorphism, Stephen Fallon in *Milton among the Philosophers* argues that, Milton moves from hylomorphism to pure materialism, or the belief that everything—including the soul—is corporeal (Fallon 100). In Fallon's view, Milton's conceptions of "corporeal" (bodily) and "incorporeal" (spiritual) are relative positions of matter that is more or less dense. Furthermore, since this matter comes from God, it is already animated since "diversified and substantial virtue should not remain dormant within the Deity but should be diffused and extended as far and in such manner as he himself may will" (*De Doctrina Christiana* 502).

Milton's discussion of original matter in *De Doctrina Christiana* is often compared to Raphael's account of matter in Book V, which contains one of the most commonly discussed portions of *Paradise Lost* in terms of Milton's monism. God sends Raphael to Earth to warn Adam "to beware / He swerve not too secure" (5.237–238), and Adam and Eve treat their angelic visitor to a meal. Adam then voices concern that the fruit in the garden may make "unsavory food perhaps / To spiritual nature" (5.401–402). Raphael informs Adam and Eve this is not the case, and in fact, their need for food is not unique in the world since "whatever was created, need / To be sustain'd and fed" (5.413–414):

> The grosser feeds the purer, Earth the Sea,
>
> Earth and the Sea feed Air, the Air those Fires
>
> Ethereal, and as lowest first the Moon;
>
> Whence in her visage round those spots, unpurg'd
>
> Vapors not yet into her substance turn'd.
>
> Nor doth the Moon no nourishment exhale
>
> The Sun that light imparts to all, receives
>
> From all his alimental recompense
>
> In humid exhalations. (5.413–425)

The speech aligns Adam and Eve with Raphael and, in fact, with the rest of God's creation through their embodiment. As Rebecca Buckham notes, "Raphael's bid for angelic embodiment is an ecological one," one that likens humans to angels but also "to everything

else" by showing that their bodies are a microcosm for a universal process (120).[6] Later, Adam will describe the moment he is created as entry into the universe's digestive processes. Even before he looks up towards the heaven, which is often described as Adam's first act, Adam wakes up in a "balmy sweat which with his beams the sun / Soon dried and on the reeking moisture fed" (8. 255–256). Thus, the sun feeds on Adam, even as Adam, Eve, and the Earth receive the sun's life-giving virtue, creating an apparently unified and symbiotic cycle, one sustained by active and integrally interconnected living and non-living parts.

Adam, with a deep curiosity "to know / Of things above his world and of their being / Who dwell in Heav'n" goes on to ask how Eden's fruit compares to heavenly food (5.455–456). Raphael, intending to assure Adam that the food he serves will do fine, explains that all things are created from

> One first matter all
>
> Endued with various forms, various degrees
>
> Of substance and in things that live of life,
>
> But more refined, more spiritous and pure
>
> As nearer to Him placed or nearer tending,
>
> Each in their several active spheres assigned
>
> Till body up to spirit work in bounds. (5.472–478)

[6] The "intimate physical connection (or correspondence) between the world at large (the macrocosm) and the body of man (the microcosm)" was a popular conception, especially in pre-Enlightenment natural philosophy (Moran 20).

Raphael's account of "one first matter" has often been equated with Milton's conception of prime matter in *De Doctrina Christiana,* and certainly the idea here seems to be similar. The speech offers up a certain amount of ontological flexibility for Adam and Eve, confirmed by Raphael's later assertion that "Your bodies may at last turn all to spirit, / Improved by tract of time, and winged ascend / Ethereal as we" (5.496–498). Later, Raphael cites God as saying that man may dwell on Earth until "by degrees of merit raised / They open to themselves at length the way / Up hither" (8.157–158). The speech seemingly collapses the distinctions between the "body" and the "spirit," or the corporeal and the incorporeal, as the two become linked by the same "first matter," which enables Adam and Eve to eventually become something else.

Milton's monism as it is presented in these passages of *Paradise Lost* and in the *De Doctrina Christiana* have been used to argue that Adam and Eve are united with the natural world and that his animist materialism connects people and the natural world within a web of interrelated and active beings. While critics have always noted that since all things are "diversified from the same living material, all are both different and kindred," they have most often looked to the radical implications of universal kinship (McColley, *Poetry and Ecology* 70). As an example, in *Contemplation of Created Things,* a work on monism and cosmology in particular, Harinder Singh Marjara finds that "the universe of *Paradise Lost,* in spite of its infinite spaces and eternal time, becomes unified, and the various phenomena are interrelated, by metaphoric similarities," like the ones explained by Raphael in Book VIII (248). By avoiding the dualistic relationship between man and nature, the epic implicitly destroys the man-as-subject/nature-as-object model that enables environmental exploitation.

The gap between people and the natural world is collapsed, so much so that when Eve ate the apple "Earth felt the wound" (9.782). Leah S. Marcus takes this line to mean that "Adam and Eve have a special attunement with the natural world," so much so that Milton describes "the Fall in vitalist fashion as a series of sympathetic responses by 'actant' elements of the natural world" (24).[7]

While monism has laid the foundation for multiple compelling ecological readings of *Paradise Lost,* I am not the first to note the ambiguity of Raphael's depiction of matter. Raphael's speech is filled with contradictions and complexities that suggest the poem's contradictory and ultimately rather exploratory depiction of the universe. The marked superiority of the spiritual over the corporeal—and the various degrees of "life" given to all beings—means that "we do not see in Raphael's natural philosophy the homogeneous saturation of all matter with spirit that we have come to identify with midcentury vitalism." In other words, "inflexible stratification is as much the focus of Raphael's vision as ontological mobility" (Rogers, *The Matter of Revolution* 111). [8] The hierarchical focus of Raphael's speech limits the horizontalizing force of "one first matter." According to Buckham in her essay "Milton's Strange Angels," Raphael's speech seemingly "shifts into a monist cosmos the hierarchical thrust of the more traditionally dualist models" (114). The

[7] The word "actant" has its roots in Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT). In "On Actor-Network Theory," Latour defines an actant as "something that acts or to which activity is granted by others" (7). In *Vibrant Matter,* Jane Bennett describes "actant" as a substitute word "for what in a more subject-centered vocabulary are called agents. Agentic capacity is now seen as differentially distributed across a wider range of ontological types" (9).

[8] Rogers goes on to argue that, despite Raphael's speech, Milton's universe in other places aligns with "vitalist works in which matter is not segregated by degrees of spiritualization but infused uniformly with spirit and energy" (114). While there are moments of doubt in his vitalism, perhaps relics of his post-Restoration lack of faith in the masses, he still ultimately depicts a monistic and vitalist universe.

focus on unity, even in difference, is disrupted by Raphael's assertion that what is "more spirituous" is not only different but unequivocally and essentially superior.

It is also unclear that what is "more spiritous" is necessarily different only in degree rather than kind, as Fallon claims.[9] Fallon argues that "moral purity is measurable in the degree of *rarefaction of body*," meaning the relative density of the body, which will eventually work up to the ethereal and light status of the angels (103; emphasis added). To rarefy something is "to make looser or less dense in texture" ("rarefy" v.1a). The imagery Fallon invokes is of Adam and Eve gradually becoming a lighter form of the same matter; however, the process of becoming more spiritous is always described as a refinement. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, to refine is "to free from impurities; to purify, cleanse; to separate *from* something base or inferior" ("refine" v.1a). Milton uses the term "refined" again in Book XII to describe the Earth's future on the Son's return, when God will "Dissolve Satan with his perverted world, then raise / From the conflagrant mass, purged and refined, / New Heav'ns, new Earth" (7.546–548). Furthermore, the process of refinement, or purification, recalls the process of distillation, which was incredibly important to both traditional alchemical medicine and the medicine associated with the new chemistry. In his 1500 work on the matter of distillation, *Book Concerning the Art of Distilling,* Hieronymus

[9] P.J. Donnelly and N.K. Sugimura have also attempted to complicate Fallon's assertion that Milton's universe is unambiguously corporeal, with Donnelly noting that all things "are differentiated out of the potential matter, according to their respective material forms determined by God" (4). The assumption of form must fundamentally change this first matter in order to give living beings free will and distance God from their ability to sin. Sugimura examines Milton's plant metaphor in 5.479–490 to find that, although Raphael is describing how one type of substance becomes another, the final, spiritual matter described is "distinct from the corporeal matter treated by physics (i.e. natural philosophy) at the beginning of the speech" (6). Thus, rather than clarifying the "refinement" of matter, "the entire process is seen to be conserved by God and shrouded in the mystery of final causation" (5).

Brunschwig defines distillation as the process of "purifying the gross from the subtle and the subtle from the gross," to the end that "the subtle spirit be made more subtle so that it can better pierce and pass through the body" (Brunschwig qtd. in Moran 15). Here refinement leads to rarefication, but only because impurities are removed. The similarities between Brunschwig's account of distillation and Raphael's refinement of matter are striking, and Brunschwig was working within an Aristotelian and hylomorphic framework, not a monistic animist materialist one. This showcases that Raphael's language is not unambiguously monist or materialist, perhaps allowing for differences in kind and large jumps between ontologically different spheres.

So, while Fallon uses the terms "rarefy" and "refine" interchangeably, and the two terms are certainly similar, the specific implications of refinement includes the sorting out of that which is less good, less pure. In the case of the postlapsarian Earth, it is that which is sinful; in the case of Adam and Eve, it is that which is definitely not sinful but corporeal. This corporeal something is not only different but fundamentally inferior, a marker of the first humans' existence in a different sphere of action than Raphael and the other angels. The depiction of sorting out the inferior from the superior recalls Raphael's depiction of creation, in which the Spirit of God "vital virtue infused and vital warmth / Throughout the fluid mass but downward purged / The black tartareous infernal dregs / Adverse to life" (7.237–239). These "dregs adverse to life" have haunted monist and vitalist readings of the text and have largely been discounted as a blip in an otherwise monistic universe, usually referring to some

concern outside creation or the true nature of matter.[10] But if creation is a process of sorting, and some of the sorting involves removing matter that is "different"—and perhaps "adverse to life"—then it seems as though matter is already multiple, perhaps even dualistic, in a way that might challenge monism, even before creation differentiates it and gives it form. To discount the dregs as a blip or sign of some outside concern is to deflect and shy away from the complexity of Milton's depiction of matter.

The complex nature of matter in Book V anticipates the depiction of recalcitrant and alien matter in Book VIII. Raphael's seeming attempts at aligning himself with Adam and Eve are limited, and if Raphael's account of angel embodiment answers questions about how Adam and Eve are related to other beings, it also brings up new questions and creates unresolvable contradictions. As Buckham notes, almost the entirety of Raphael's account "both invites and impedes recognition" (128). For example, when Adam asks Raphael "Love not Heav'nly spirits? And how their love / Express they?" (8.615–616), Raphael "glowed / Celestial rosy red, love's proper hue" (8.618–619). Raphael blushes and goes on to describe angelic sex. "If spirits embrace, / Total they mix, union of pure with pure" (8.626–627) without the obstacle "Of membrane, joint or limb" (8.625). Although Raphael attempts to connect with Adam and Eve by explaining that angels also enjoy physical love, the kind of physical love he describes is so strange as to cause readers to ask questions about differences in angelic and human embodiment: "Does the human mode of embodiment categorically

[10] Fallon cites this section a few times without reference to any issue they might cause a monistic or vitalistic reading; he argues, like Rogers, that they are a sign of "Milton's distaste for the unruly material of the mass of his countrymen" (110). More recently, Smith in "The Ecology of Chaos in *Paradise Lost*" agrees with Woodhouse that the dregs are a "relic of some anxious consideration of the problem of evil" (Woodhouse qtd. by Smith 44).

change the experience of sexual pleasure" (Buckham 112). Buckham frames Raphael's blush and his explanation of sex as Milton's nod towards the reality that human identification with other species, especially in poetry, might serve to anthropomorphize when other species have inner lives which elude language and human comprehension (Buckham 134). The example she gives is of looking at an octopus in a tank; one might see the octopus and recognize eyes, like ours, but perhaps octopi use photoreceptors in their tentacles to perceive the world in a way that lies beyond our sensory experience; in this way, "to speak of octopus eyes and arms is to speak metaphorically" by necessity (134). I argue that *Paradise Lost* takes the limits of human identification with universal embodiment—which must be a metaphor—a step beyond the interspecies to be extended to the universe and matter, postulating the recalcitrance and unknowability rather than the interactivity of matter, even other corporeal forms of matter.

Like many of Adam and Raphael's points of discussion, Raphael's explanation of the material heavens begins with a question from Adam. After Raphael has related the war in heaven and the story of creation, Adam—ever curious—pushes him for more information since "Something yet of doubt remains / Which only thy solution can resolve" (8.13–14). Adam sees that the Earth is seemingly insignificant, "A spot, a grain, / An atom, with the firmament compared / And all her numbered stars" (8.16–18). At the same time, the entire visible heavens seem to exist "merely to officiate light / Round this opaceous earth, this punctual spot" (8.22–23). Adam then asks Raphael to clarify what to him seems incomprehensible:

> … I oft admire

How Nature wise and frugal could commit

Such disproportions with superfluous hand

So many nobler bodies to create

Greater so manifold to this one use. (8.25–29)

Like scientific inquiry of its day, the question blends various discourses: social, theological, and scientific/philosophical. The question, which is more like a statement of issue or doubt, is essentially concerned with hierarchy, and the language surrounding it is extremely suggestive and indebted to the language of social order. It addresses what Adam perceives as a hierarchical inversion since the Earth, the apparently lesser body, is being "Served by more noble than herself" (8.34–35). Notice that the language is hierarchical and gendered, and the inversion he sees in the heavens—a male body circling around a female—seems to also invert the traditional gendered hierarchy, the effects of which I will explore in the next section. This observation brings into question a previous observation, similar to a universal truth, that Adam espouses about nature, that it is "wise and frugal" and would not create "disproportions" or superfluous excess.

On the surface, Adam's question makes sense, but in context, his presentation of nature as "frugal" seems odd considering the incredible—often seemingly superfluous—abundance of Paradise. The initial description of Paradise in Book IV is rich, abundant, and even sensual, containing "all delight of human sense" (4.206). The "rich trees wept odorous gums and balm" (4.217), the flowers "poured forth profuse on hill and dale and plain" (4.243), and "the mantling vine / Lays forth her purple grape and gently creeps / Luxuriant"

(4.258–260). Adam even tells Eve not to think too much of the one fruit that is forbidden considering this bounty, since they "enjoy / Free leave so large to all things else and choice / Unlimited of manifold delights" (4.433–434). The richness of Paradise is so great that Adam and Eve's task of pruning and managing the Garden seems at times pointless, since the overgrown branches "mock our scant manuring and require / More hands than ours to lop their wanton growth" (4.628–629). Again and again, the overabundance of nature's gifts to Adam and Eve are emphasized. Why, then, should the presence of these great and noble bodies serving the Earth, their home, be disturbing to Adam?

I believe the answer lies in Book VIII in Adam's account of his own creation, specifically in his account of his education from God, which is meant to lead Adam to the ability to "judge of fit and meet" (8.448). In analyzing the proportions of the heavens, he appears to be attempting to exercise this ability. Adam must learn what is "fit," or "well adapted or suite to the conditions or circumstances of the case, answering the purpose, proper or appropriate" through an dialogue with God ("fit" adj.1a).[11] God tells Adam "all the Earth / To thee and to thy race I give. As lord / Possess it and all things that therein live" (4.338–340). Adam is grateful since God has provided for him "with hands so liberal" (8.363), but he wonders "Who can enjoy alone / Or all enjoying what contentment find?" (8.365–366). God goes on to ask "What call'st thou solitude? Is not the earth / With various living

[11] For a fuller explanation of Adam and Eve's respective educations as a sort of ongoing and rather open-ended dialogue, see Kristin Pruitt's *Gender and the Power of Relationship.* While I will disagree with her in my next section in terms of how she treats the interplay of hierarchy and mutuality, she provides a compelling analysis of how Adam and Eve are supposed to learn.

creatures and the air / replenished?" (8.369–371). But Adam, unrelenting, offers the following:

> Hast thou not made me here Thy substitute
>
> And these inferior far beneath me set?
>
> Among unequals what society
>
> Can sort, what harmony or true delight,
>
> Which must be mutual in *proportion* due
>
> Given and received? (8.381–386; emphasis added).

Furthermore, he must go on to judge the other end of the hierarchy and explain why a companion would not be appropriate, or fit, for God, to whom he says "No need that Thou / Shouldst propagate, already infinite / And through all numbers absolute" (8.419–421). It is appropriate for him to have another human, as opposed to an animal, as a mate, but it would be "superfluous" for God to have any like companion. God is pleased at Adam's judgment and creates Eve, who is presumably a fit companion (a concept I will explore more in the next section). Thus, Adam's post-educational idea of nature as "wise and frugal" might have more to do with what he says immediately after: that nature should not commit disproportions, even in abundance. Adam presents God as giving liberally but not disproportionally, since Adam's rulership and the plenty available to him are justified by his status as God's substitute on Earth. Furthermore, Adam learns that by observing the natural world he can gain insight into what is appropriate for him, especially in relation to his

partnership with Eve. His question indicates a kind of newly introduced doubt that what God has created is not in fact "fit and meet," potentially upsetting the entirety of the Edenic hierarchy as Adam's foundational beliefs about the philosophy of nature is challenged. As Shannon Miller notes in *Engendering the Fall,* Adam's question seems to affirm that "Social order—the 'greater' serving the 'less'—is potentially disrupted by scientific inquiry" (159).

Raphael's response emphasizes not the concreteness of the hierarchy that Adam questions, but rather the mysteriousness of that hierarchy. He begins by acknowledging the motivation behind Adam's question, saying, "To ask or search I blame thee not for heav'n / Is as the book of God before thee set" (8.65-66). However, unlike in previous sections where Raphael has informed Adam at his request, Raphael begins to admonish Adam:

> From man or angel the Great Architect
>
> Did wisely to conceal and not divulge
>
> His secrets to be scanned by them who ought
>
> Rather admire. (8.72-75)

It is clear that Raphael, an angel, is no more certain of the answer than Adam, although, as the speech that follows shows, he keeps abreast of Renaissance scientific theory. Although Adam is given "all the earth" to obtain mastery over, there are aspects of God's creation that Adam cannot comprehend, and which must be taken on faith. Raphael emphasizes this further by ridiculing how people in the future will also "calculate the stars" (8.79) because they believe "bodies bright and greater should not serve / The less bright" (8.87-88). Raphael affirms, then, that scientific inquiry and questions about natural hierarchy are integrally

intertwined. Adam's confusion about the discrepancies in nature, the hierarchical inversion he observes, is deeply tied to his ideas about the hierarchy that he sees in the natural world.

Raphael does little to clarify the matter of disproportions for Adam. He seems to address Adam's question, saying that, although the Sun looks more brilliant than the Earth, "great / Or bright infers not excellence" and the Earth "may of solid good contain / More plenty than the sun that barren shines" (8.91-92). This justifies the "restless revolution day by day / Repeated" for the sake of the "sedentary earth" (8.31–32). Furthermore, the incomprehensible size of the universe may be so "man may know he dwells not alone" (8.103). The implication is that Adam is mistaken in how he judges what comprises a "nobler body." However, Raphael never solidifies what does represent a "nobler body," instead simply presenting a hypothesis that Adam had not considered and arguing that it "may" be true. He goes on to destabilize his initial claim further in his exploration of the Copernican and Ptolemaic systems. He asks Adam, "What if the Sun / Be center to the world and other stars / By his attractive virtue and their own / Incited dance about him various round?" (8.121–125). This reference to the Copernican model and the "attractive virtue" of the Sun counteracts his previous claim that the sedentary position of the Earth is justified by the Earth having the most good in the universe, and it is presented as an alternative explanation for the disproportion Adam sees. So, then, the Earth would be serving a male "nobler body," and Adam's initial idea of greater brightness implying greater nobility would be affirmed, seemingly also affirming his instincts based on sensory experience.

Even the idea that the universe exists for people alone, which Raphael initially seems to argue in asserting the Earth's primacy, is put into doubt by Raphael's suggestion that the

Earth itself reflects light, which is sent "To the terrestrial moon," which may have "fields and inhabitants" (8.144; 145). The universe is infinite and potentially full of "other suns perhaps / With their attendant moons" all of which Adam may "descry / Communicating male and female light" (8.149–150). It would be better to believe that there were creatures on other worlds, Raphael says, than to think that nature committed a disproportion. Raphael asserts that it is not Adam's place to ask questions about the universe outside Paradise: "Of other creatures as Him pleases best, / Wherever placed, let Him dispose" (169–170). The reference to "place" here refers to the possibility of creatures on other worlds, brought up by Raphael earlier. But in light of Raphael's earlier statement that all matter comes from God but is "nearer to him *placed* or near tending," his statement has hierarchical implications as well (5.476; emphasis added). This complicates Raphael's ascension chain in Book V by introducing an unknown number of unknown participants, ones who we must assume play their own roles in their assigned spheres without being able to know fully if that is true. This seems to be confirmed in Raphael's final admonition to Adam on the subject, "Dream not of other worlds, what creatures there / Live in what state, condition or degree" (8.176). Thus, God will "dispose," or govern, His creatures to His best pleasure, and we must trust that this disposal will put everything into its most appropriate and fitting place, despite our lack of sensory evidence.

Raphael additionally complicates Milton's supposed monism by presenting a gap between corporeal and incorporeal material in his explanation of the Ptolemaic system:

> The swiftness of those circles attribute,
>
> Though numberless, to his omnipotence,

That to corporeal substances could add

Speed almost spiritual. (8.107–110)

While perhaps the existence of corporeal objects with spiritual speed might at first seem to collapse the gap between body and spirit, the presence of "speed almost spiritual" in physical astronomical bodies is presented as only possible through direct divine intervention. While they may be made up of an original matter, the difference between "corporeal" and "incorporeal" must functionally be made in order to account for the large gap between them. The way corporeal brushes up against incorporeal here seems to go beyond traditional dualistic language and affirm that matter, once it takes on form, also takes on ontologically different ranks. Furthermore, how that matter then acts or moves may be subject to something that surpasses scientific inquiry; that is, divine intervention, which may alter and change objects so that "corporeal" substances can also have incredible speed. In that case, the universe is not totally able to organize itself, but it is also potentially not mechanistic and understandable by human reason and observation alone.

Rather than giving Adam any clear-cut answers, Raphael gives him highly conflicting messages, choosing to leave the answer to Adam's questions, as well as the hierarchical implications of their conversation, indeterminate. Even as Raphael admonishes Adam that "heav'n is for thee too high / To know what passes there," he introduces Adam to new and tantalizing ideas about the universe that Adam would never have been able to perceive with his own senses (8.172-173). Even as he seems to grant potential answers, he destabilizes each one, emphasizing the unknowability of a universe which is "Ordained for uses to his Lord best known" (5.105). While Fallon asserts that "An understanding of monism is necessary for

Adam if he is to grasp his place in Milton's universe" (1), this is one of the few places in the text that Adam exhibits a genuine interest in the organization and makeup of matter within his universe, and stratification, distance, and indeterminacy are emphasized to a much larger extent than continuity. God may have created a wonderfully interactive and sympathetic environment for Adam and Eve, but the matter He created from and the things He created also surpass Adam and Eve's perception and understanding in a way that preserves mystery and demands faith in the face of seemingly inescapable anxiety. In their superfluity and their distance, cosmic bodies exceed Adam and Raphael's place for them within the natural/social hierarchy. In this way, Milton presents the boundaries of human identification with universal embodiment and recognizes the presence of a limiting force on the microcosm/macrocosm poetic metaphor from Raphael. This limiting force rests specifically in the recalcitrance and unknowability—rather than the interactivity—of both the first matter and that which is created from it. Thus, the heavens are unable to be wielded by people, as "things remote / From use, obscure and subtle," and the propriety of God's organization of the universe must be taken on faith (5.191-192).

CHAPTER TWO

Adam's initial question in Book VIII comes from his wonder at "How Nature wise and frugal could commit / Such disproportions with superfluous hand" (8.26–27). While Adam says, "God hath bid dwell far off all anxious cares" (8.185), and he seemingly accepts Raphael's admonition to "be lowly wise" (8.173), Adam's observations of nature's disproportions continues in his discussion of Eve, connecting his socially loaded and gendered observations of the heavens to his lived experience with Eve on Earth. Adam's observations of heavenly bodies, and the recalcitrance of these bodies, introduces doubts about how the universe and the hierarchies within it are organized, including the Edenic gender hierarchy. Adam's scientific inquiry and doubts related to natural philosophy thus impact the social realm by indicating the possibility that natural hierarchies may contain disproportions. The questions of the organization of the natural world and the question of the Edenic social organization are integrally intertwined, reflecting the powerful disruptive force of the varied empirical and philosophical discourses during Milton's time. Adam, Eve, and even Raphael must wrestle with uncertainties and difficulties pertaining to the natural world in the same way we do, counteracting the critical claim of a wholly sympathetic and united world before the fall. This also makes it possible for questions of science and natural philosophy to have very real and disruptive consequences since Adam and Eve have the ability to be mistaken and think wrongly about the universe and its workings, which has corresponding social consequences.

Adam's doubts about the organization of the universe and his doubts about the related issue of the gender hierarchy are treated jointly in Book VIII. After Raphael finishes his

admonition and explanation of the cosmos, Adam, wishing to keep his conversation with the angel going, suggests they "descend / A lower flight and speak of things at hand / Useful" (8.198–200). He then relates his creation, the story of his education from God, and Eve's creation, events that Raphael apparently missed. [12] After Adam relates Eve's creation, he tells Raphael about his feelings towards Eve, noting that he is "here only weak," and in doing so, he worries that perhaps

> Nature failed in me and left some part
>
> Not proof enough such object to sustain
>
> Or from my side subducting took perhaps
>
> More than enough. (8.534-537)

This passage suggests an analogy between Adam's observations of the heavens and what he observes in his relationship with Eve. The idea of nature's "failure" recalls his concerns earlier that nature committed disproportions "with superfluous hand" in the creation of the heavens (8.27). The disproportion represents some kind of inversion of the gender hierarchy; he is either lacking will, or Eve has "more than enough."[13] Furthermore, the "Or" that separates the two potential explanations (always significant in Milton's text) reveals Adam's

[12] Much scholarship has been dedicated to Adam and Eve's diverging creation stories. Eve recounts her own creation in Book IV, and Adam recounts her creation in Book VIII. My thesis does not analyze these diverging accounts, although I do analyze Adam's account of his own education, but solid interpretations can be found in many of the works on *Paradise Lost* I cite, including Kristin Pruitt's *Gender and the Power of Relationship* and Diane McColley's *Milton's Eve.*

[13]Herman dismisses Adam's feeling of lack as something from which he "quickly recovers and settles all the blame on Eve" (145), but this seems to me to dismiss Adam's sense of disproportion and the questions about the justness of hierarchy that prompts for him. These are aspects of Adam's Edenic experience that lead to his fall as much as a sense of inferiority leads to Eve's.

purpose in this speech; he is asking a series of questions which function as hypotheses for why Eve has this effect on him and what this inversion of the seemingly natural hierarchy could mean. This, I argue, is Adam's primary motivation in his speech, and it clearly parallels his concerns in Book VIII, where his sensory observations also conflict with his knowledge of nature as "wise and frugal" (8.25). In *Engendering the Fall,* Shannon Miller similarly notes the connection between the two discourses, arguing that Milton understands the power of changes in natural philosophy to disrupt social hierarchy and "the claims of apolitical knowledge, of acquiring information outside of—and without disturbing—the bounds of social or political practices was, for Milton, untenable" (160).

In order to appreciate Adam's concerns, it is important to gain a better understanding of prelapsarian gender relations in Paradise. Milton's depiction of gender in *Paradise Lost* is highly controversial and thoroughly discussed by critics. Gilbert and Gubar argue that Milton's misogynistic depiction of Eve strongly reinforces the "story of woman's secondness, her otherness, and how that otherness leads inexorably to her demonic anger, her sin, her fall" (191). This story perpetuates the exclusion of women from "the garden of poetry" and works as a suppressive force for would-be female authors (191). Gilbert and Gubar and other critics find plenty of evidence of Milton's misogyny in the text, particularly in a few famous passages in Book IV. Although they are both creatures "of far nobler shape erect and tall, / Godlike erect with native honor clad," the narrator also observes the two are

> Not equal as their sex not equal seemed:
>
> For contemplation he and valor formed,

For softness she and sweet attractive grace:

He for God only, she for God in him. (4.296–299)

This seems to settle Adam and Eve's difference in their very being; Eve was created last as a mate for Adam, and she is less a perfect image of God. Eve addresses Adam as her head distinctly: "O thou for whom / And from whom I was formed flesh of thy flesh / And without whom am to no end" (4.440–442). While Adam looks up to the heavens after he is created, Eve immediately looks down into a reflective pool, enamored with her own reflection, a scene that has sometimes been interpreted as exhibiting Eve's vanity.[14] Adam is the one who actively engages in discourse with Raphael, and Eve is a silent spectator. As Allison Bare notes, Eve's end seems to lie in how well she pleases Adam, and she is objectified or manipulated by male figures in the poem (94).

However, Milton's misogyny is by no means clearly defined or simple, and his portrayal of Adam and Eve goes beyond stereotypes that equate men with reason/the heavens and women with emotion/the Earth. [15] In asking for a mate, Adam claims to desire an equal, and he asks God "Among unequals what society / Can sort, what harmony or true delight, / Which must be mutual in proportion due?" (8.384-386). Adam's desire is clearly for

[14] This is not necessarily the case according to Lewalski's *Life of John Milton* (483).

[15]The critical discussion on Milton's misogyny is still very much current, as evidenced by Allison Bare's 2018 article. Bare accuses recent critics of taking part in a "recent mode of conservative interpretation within the feminist current of Milton studies," and attempts to revive critiques of Milton's sexism by exhibiting that Eve is objectified throughout *Paradise Lost* (95). Her section on "Eve's Critical Context" is informative in understanding the debate. Joseph Wittreich in *Feminist Milton,* Kristin Pruitt in *Gender and the Power of Relationship,* and Karen Edwards in "Resisting Representation" give solid, if less recent, analyses of the camps feminist critics of Milton have often found themselves in (one emphasizing mutuality, the other hierarchy).

companionship, and his desire for a "mutual," as opposed to unequal, relationship is what prompts God to create Eve.[16] There is further evidence of Eve's powers of reason and her independent contributions to the society of Eden, showing, as Karen Edwards notes, that Eve is more than "Milton's representation of a perfectly desirable woman" through the lens of male fantasy ("Resisting Representation" 252). Eve is the first to take up an autobiographical account of her creation, the first to ask any question pertaining to the organization of the universe, the first to speak a love sonnet to another person, and she is the first to repent and take responsibility for her sin in Book X. As Barbara Lewalski notes, "Both before and after the fall Eve often proposes issues for discussion, initiates action, and leads in some new direction" (482).[17] Thus, hierarchy in relationships obviously exists in the garden, even as mutuality paradoxically also exists. Kristin Pruitt in *Gender and the Power of Relationship* notes, "Milton underscores the interplay between hierarchy and reciprocity through language and structure" (47). To Pruitt, this interplay yields unity through difference, but I argue that it is primarily a source of tension.

This tension exists between how Adam and Eve feel for one another and the divinely ordained gender hierarchy. Interestingly, the fruit in the Garden and marriage as an

[16] Milton's idea of companionate marriage, as outlined in his divorce tracts, are themselves incredibly complicated, and the equality of women was certainly not the central point of his texts. In *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* women are hardly mentioned, except as people men might need to divorce. At the same time, the divorce tracts' arguments implicitly extend the civil liberty of divorce to women, and his later tract *De Doctrina Christiana* does address the female plight in marriage directly. Gina Hausknecht argues in "The Gender of Civic Virtue" that Milton's prose shows that "men can be insufficiently masculine, and women are not unequivocally subordinate," revealing that the natural hierarchies he sometimes focuses on in his works might be provisional and subject to change (32).

[17] In chapter 13 of her seminal biography, *The Life of John Milton,* Lewalski gives an extremely thorough and well-researched analysis of the complicated gender relations in *Paradise Lost*.

institution are treated in one chapter in *De Doctrina Christiana.* John Rogers makes much of this connection in the following passage in particular:

> Seeing, however, that man was made in the image of God, and had the whole law of nature so implanted and innate in him, that he needed no precept to enforce its observance, it follows that if he received any additional commands, whether respecting the tree of knowledge, or the institution of marriage, these commands formed no part of the law of nature, which is sufficient of itself to teach whatever is agreeable to right reason, that is to say, whatever is intrinsically good (510).

In "Transported Touch," John Rogers makes much of Milton's joint treatment of the tree and marriage. Milton distinguishes between "positive right," which is handed down by a just authority figure on matters that would otherwise be morally unimportant, and natural law, which can be intuited as good in and of itself. In the divorce tracts, Milton is very careful to distinguish the two, and the status of marriage as a divine edict rather than a result of natural law is what allows men and women to divorce, but when that logic transfers over to the first marriage, a prelapsarian marriage, this commitment becomes more tricky. I agree with Rogers that it is fundamentally unclear in *Paradise Lost* whether Adam and Eve are naturally different enough from each other to make their prelapsarian hierarchical relationship a matter of natural law as opposed to positive right. It is only clear that there is "reservation of superior rights to the husband" by God (*De Doctrina Christiana* 511). Their affinity for each other, especially Adam's attraction towards Eve, seems to be a result of natural law, but Eve must be informed of sacred marriage rites, and she obeys Adam because it is what "God ordains" (4.636). To be clear, I am not arguing that from Milton's point of view, Adam and

Eve were justified in inverting the marriage hierarchy or that the marriage commandment should have been broken from Milton's perspective because it may be an arbitrary rule; rather, like Rogers, I argue that Milton's exploration of the arbitrary gender hierarchy is a result of "his strong theodicial determination to understand how the fall can occur in a perfect world" (Rogers 126), a project that requires the examination of the power structures and gendered contexts surrounding Adam and Eve's decision-making.

It is when Adam interacts with Eve, especially when he feels "transported touch" (8.530), that this hierarchy begins to invert, and he senses disproportions that threaten his divinely ordained role as Eve's head. Rogers similarly notes that "touch is that sensation that compels Adam to forget the divine marriage commandment, the arbitrary decree by which he was appointed Eve's superior" (128). After noting the initial disproportion, positing that perhaps God took "more than enough," Adam goes on to say God "at least, on her bestow'd / Too much ornament, in outward / Elaborate, of inward less exact" (8.537–539). Some critics, Peter Herman among them, argue that "because Eve elicits passion, she cannot be the intellectual equal he wants" (Herman 144), and Adam is disappointed that he did not receive a partner "fit to participate / All rational delight" (8.390–391). Adam's primary motivation in this section is not to voice his dissatisfaction with Eve, or even to emphasize her subordination, but rather to explore and attempt to explain the disproportion in the Edenic gender hierarchy. God "at least" gave Eve too much ornament, one potential explanation for the natural state of equality he senses between them, which rubs up against the positive edict of marriage. He justifies the idea that the disproportion may rest with the intensity of Eve's beauty with the following statement:

For well I understand in the prime end

Of nature her th' inferior in the mind

And inward faculties which most excel,

In outward also her resembling less

His image who made both and less expressing

The character of that dominion giv'n

O'er other creatures (8.540-546).

Adam here appeals to "the prime end / Of nature" to make his claim of Eve's inferiority, seemingly invoking natural law in his position over Eve, although how he reckons her inferiority is unclear. Adam was created first, and, as Raphael tells Adam, "God on thee / Abundantly His gifts hath also poured / Inward and outward both, His image fair" (8.219–220). Thus, Raphael has already affirmed Adam's nature as "exact" both inwardly and outwardly. This seems to be knowledge that Adam should have (it is certainly knowledge that Raphael has emphasized in his discourse), and it makes his position over Eve appropriate, proportional.

The idea that his sense of superiority over Eve comes from his observations of her, as Herman claims, is countered by the next few lines, in which Adam recounts his doubts about the current hierarchical arrangement:

Yet when I approach

Her loveliness so absolute she seems

And in herself complete so well to know

Her own that what she wills to do or say

Seems wisest, virtuousest, discreetest, best. (8.546–550)

The "Yet" beginning the speech shows that Adam is now contradicting what he technically knows about Eve. While "loveliness" nods towards Eve's outward appearance, Adam is no longer very clearly discussing only her outward showiness and the passion it arouses in him. She seems "to know / Her own." She seems to him, when he sees her, talks to her, and touches her, to be "in herself complete," perhaps in a way that Adam does not himself feel.[18] While touching is the catalyst for Adam's feelings toward Eve, creating a "natural state of equality" (Rogers 128), Adam's observations of Eve's behavior serve not to counteract that state of equality but to affirm it, causing him to question the divinely ordained institution of marriage in that he begins to question his status as Eve's head.

The gendered hierarchy is dangerously inverted here, revealing the vulnerability Adam feels in his authority, despite the apparently divine edict behind it. In the next section, he further elaborates what occurs when he interacts with Eve:

All higher knowledge in her presence falls

Degraded. Wisdom in discourse with her

Loses discount'nanced and like folly shows.

[18] Adam is the one to ask for companionship, and, as Lewalski notes, he's pretty needy (483).

Authority and Reason on her wait

As one intended first, not after made

Occasionally. And to consummate all,

Greatness of mind and nobleness their seat

Build in her and create an awe

About her as a guard angelic placed. (8.546-559)

This is certainly a very anxious speech for Adam. As Catherine Belsey notes, rather than affirming Adam's power over Eve or reflecting his disappointment in Eve, "the stress is all on Adam's vulnerability" and the unusual fragility his position over Eve brings him (65). While these lines have often been used to further the argument that Eve cannot bring him the rational delight he craved when he asked for a mate, that may not necessarily be the case, especially if we consider his observations of her completeness and the reasoning capacities we see Eve exhibit elsewhere. His most damning observation that "Wisdom in discourse with her / Loses discount'nanced" might simply indicate that discourse with Eve contradicts his "higher knowledge," the knowledge of the divine ordination and Eve's inferiority, causing him to act against wisdom by inverting the gender hierarchy and viewing Eve as an equal, or perhaps even as a superior. It does not necessarily indicate that he cannot exercise any kind of wisdom in her presence, and, in fact, other places in the text seem to indicate the opposite. Furthermore, while "Authority and Reason on her wait," it is as "one intended first, not after made" (8.545-546). This indicates that Adam views Eve as potentially having characteristics of the "one intended first" as opposed to the one created after, signaling a possible inversion

in the roles intended by their order of creation. Thus, it is not necessarily negative that "Authority and Reason" wait on, or serve, somebody, only that they seemingly serve the wrong person; Adam is the head and the one "intended" and created first. As in the earlier portions of Book VIII, Adam is attempting to parse what makes "nobler bodies" noble.

The primary point of the speech is not Adam's displeasure but rather his anxiety about the vulnerability of the hierarchy he finds himself in (and his anxiety about the source of his anxiety, which is uncertain). The speech indicates a doubt on Adam's part—resulting from his sensual experience—that he and Eve might not be organized according to any essential superiority or inferiority, supporting Rogers' hypothesis that sexual hierarchy is not definitively a result of natural law, which prelapsarian humans will piece together on their own. Rather, it is something that must be taken on faith, like the danger of the fruit. Furthermore, his inability to be certain of Eve's true nature and his own place in relation to her seems to indicate that Adam and Eve both retain a certain amount of anxiety-inducing ontological independence, despite Adam's claim that Eve's actions "declare unfeigned / Union of mind or in us both one soul" (8.603-604). Adam, who supposedly understands the nature of Paradise and of every animal, finds himself uncertain about his hierarchical relationship with Eve, just as he is uncertain about the nature of the heavens or what they mean for his life on Earth. This indicates a prelapsarian universe defined as much by distance and uncertainty as monistic continuity and sympathy, and this distance means prelapsarian Adam must wrestle with concerns about the boundaries of knowledge, the nature of matter

and hierarchy, and gender relations, concerns that were very much contemporary to Milton's own time.[19]

Raphael is disturbed by Adam's musings on Eve more than by any of Adam's other questions, and his response is to admonish Adam "with contracted brow" (8.560). He tells Adam to "Accuse not Nature: she hath done her part, / Do thou but thine and be not diffident / Of Wisdom!" (8.561–552). Raphael additionally cautions Adam to avoid "attributing overmuch to things / Less excellent" (8.565–566), and he asks him,

> What transports thee so,
>
> An outside? Fair no doubt and worthy well
>
> Thy cherishing, thy honoring, and thy love,
>
> Not thy subjection. (8.567–570)

Raphael focuses primarily on Adam's early claim to feel "transported" when he sees and touches Eve, urging him to refrain from the passion that seemingly makes him forget his place as her head. He then seemingly moves on to Adam's concerns about his own lack, or Eve's excess, saying, "Weigh with her thyself, / Then value. Oft times nothing profits more / Than self-esteem grounded on just and right" (8.570–571). If he continues to practice self-esteem and acknowledge himself as Eve's head, she will also do so "and to realities yield all her shows" (8.574–575). These lines assume that Adam's position over Eve is due to his

[19] See Alinda J. Sumers's "Milton's Mat(t)erology: *Paradise Lost* and the Seventeenth-Century 'Querelle de Femmes'" and Shannon Miller's *Engendering the Fall* for compelling accounts of Milton's interactions with the seventeenth-century debate around women.

natural superiority, and he only needs to put that superiority in a proper light. Raphael does not directly address the conflict Adam seems to feel between natural law (his physical bond with Eve based on mutuality) and positive right (his divinely ordained position as Eve's head), assuming one must be the natural result of the other.

It is my argument that the difficult position that conflict creates for Adam is in large part a mystery to Raphael because of the differences in the embodied modes of being between humans and angels, and this causes Raphael to give insufficient and perhaps even faulty advice to Adam. As I established in my last section, Raphael's attempts to relate to Adam are limited by the ontological differences between them, and it is appropriate to reiterate some of those arguments now as we explore the effects of those differences on Adam and Raphael's discourse. As stated in Book V, Raphael is an "intelligential" being, as opposed to Adam, who is a "rational" being, although Raphael links both in their need for food (5.408–409). Because they are different, their methods of inquiry are different as well, as Raphael notes that beings may come to Reason in ways "discursive or intuitive" (5.487), with angels more often coming to knowledge intuitively.[20] His description of what might be called angelic sex is a strange "union of pure with pure" (8.626) without the obstacle "of membrane, joint or limb" (8.625). The narrator in Book I similarly notes that spirits can take on male or female form, "so soft / And uncompounded is their essence pure, / Not tied or manacled with joint or limb" (1.424–426). It is hard to imagine how people could enjoy a caress, for instance, without a discrete body part to be caressed, or how those discrete,

[20] How exactly Raphael knows what he knows and how much he knows is difficult to say; he seems at times to be prophetic, but he admits that there is knowledge blocked even to angels.

individually feeling limbs could be a hindrance to pleasure. Raphael is evidenced as experiencing fundamentally different "modes of embodiment" that make his attempts to relate to Adam in terms of his strange, even as they seem to flag similarities (Buckham 118).[21]

Thus, these facts hang over Raphael's advice to Adam and Eve: angels do not procreate, their mode of pleasure may fundamentally differ from our own, and their method of reasoning is different from our own. These concerns are very important to the discussion between Adam and Raphael, and the gap between the angel and the human is evidenced by the next few lines of the text. Raphael acknowledges Eve's beauty, saying she is "fair no doubt and worthy well / Thy cherishing" (8.568–569), and he encourages Adam to cherish his mate, who sees him when he is "seen least wise" (8.578). But Raphael also draws a perhaps overly strict line between Adam's physical bond with Eve and a love based in reason, warning him,

> If the sense of touch whereby mankind
>
> Is propagated seem such dear delight
>
> Beyond all other, think the same vouchsafed
>
> To cattle and each beast. (8.579–582)

[21] In his essay in *The Cambridge Companion to* Paradise Lost, Joad Raymond also notes that "to understand the angels as humanlike characters is to efface the gulf between us and them, and this gulf is one of the things that Milton brings into focus at moments throughout the poem" (139).

He goes on to tell him, quite plainly, “In loving thou dost well, in passion not” (8.589). Real love “hath his seat / In reason and is judicious, is the scale / By which to Heav’nly love thou may’st ascend” (8.589–591). Raphael distinguishes reasonable love and passionate love, and he warns that Adam and Eve’s physical relationship (based in natural law) alone is nothing but a bestial need to procreate. He identifies the divinely ordained aspect as that which sets them apart from beasts. Raphael’s solution is to choose one over the other, to preserve reason over sense, hoping to avoid the state of equality created by the natural affinity between them.

But in doing so, he overcorrects Adam and misunderstands the concerns underlining his speech. In other places in the text, Adam and Eve’s physical affection for one another is positive, and it is seen adding to their marital bliss. In Book IV, Milton writes, “Hail wedded love, mysterious law, true source / Of human offspring, sole propriety / In Paradise, of all things common else” (4.750–752). Clearly, physical touch and reproduction within marriage are important to the divine state of marriage. The important part of Adam’s speech that Raphael misses is the disproportion in his own relationship with Eve, a disproportion perhaps initiated by touch but affirmed through observation of both Eve and the heavens. In focusing on Adam’s lack of self-esteem and dismissing claims of Eve’s completeness rather than addressing them, Raphael only obliquely addresses Adam’s real concern in favor of a warning to sexual boundaries and temperance. This warning against being “sunk in carnal pleasure” seems odd considering the innocence of Adam and Eve’s relationship (8.593), and it perhaps adds a restriction—and thus an additional temptation—where previously there was none. Furthermore, the overreliance on reason divorced from faith and sense and Satan’s manipulation of sense, ends up being extremely problematic for Eve. While nowhere does

Milton allow that sensual relations are superior to reasonable ones, Raphael's misunderstanding of the sensual aspect of Adam and Eve's relationship and the role it takes in Adam's perception of Eve ill prepares them for what is to come.

While Raphael intends to correct Adam, what Adam hears is a superficial understanding of his original message as a result of the ontological difference between them, and his speech thus becomes a rebuttal of sorts, explaining the faults Adam sees in Raphael's own understanding. Adam is "half abashed" by Raphael's speech (8.595), but his response seems to come from the half of himself that is quite unabashed. Adam defends his previous speech and offers a correction and an explanation for Raphael. He says,

> Neither her outside formed so fair nor aught
>
> In procreation common to all kinds
>
> (Though higher of the genial bed by far
>
> And with mysterious reverence I deem)
>
> So much delights me as those graceful acts,
>
> Those thousand decencies that daily flow
>
> From all her words and action. (8.595–600)

Adam begins by defending the passionate feelings he has toward Eve, noting that Raphael's comparison between their sexual relations and animal sexual relations is unfair. His language of the "mysterious reverence" of the marriage bed echoes the narrator's reference to the divine "mysterious law" of procreation in Book IV. While many critics have seen Adam as

backtracking in the rest of this speech, it is also possible he is addressing aspects of it that Raphael failed to respond to, namely that Eve is in herself "complete," appealing, kind, and capable of a "thousand decencies." This is what affirms his sensory suspicions of her equality, and while they cause him to "declare unfeigned / Union of mind or in us both one soul. / Harmony to behold in wedded pair" (8.602–604). He asserts the things he loves about Eve "subject not" (8.605). While he seems to be assuring Raphael there is nothing to worry about in terms of inverting the marital hierarchy, he pointedly chooses to avoid the topic of his own position of head over Eve, emphasizing their unity and their mutuality. The topics of hierarchy and disproportion, the starting point of Adam's concerns, are ultimately unresolved.

Adam's next step in his own defense is to outline the connection between sense and reason, giving Raphael an insight into how people move toward reason and hinting at his discontent at Raphael's misunderstanding. Adam says he may "meet with various objects from the sense / Variously representing" and still "approve the best and follow what I approve" (8.609–611). Notably, Adam's account of Reason also recalls his language to Eve after she has a dream introduced by Satan, who is found in Book IV "squat like a toad close at the ear of Eve" (4.800). As a result, she wakes up from a dream of taking the fruit in Book V and is visibly disturbed by the "offense and trouble" of the vision (5.34), in which Satan promises the fruit can "make gods of men" (4.70). [22] There, Adam responds to Eve by giving an account of the Fancy. Adam says Fancy

[22] Critics have concerned themselves with the part Eve might have in the dream and whether she is a willing participant, perhaps making this the true moment of the fall, a topic I can do little justice to considering my concern with the dream is primarily how it relates to Adam's discourse in Book VIII. For a fuller overview of

forms imaginations, airy shapes

Which Reason joining or disjoining frames

All what we affirm or what deny and call

Our knowledge and opinions. (4.103–108)

Thus, with Reason, "Evil into the mind of god or man / May come and go, so unapproved" (5.117–118), just as Adam's misgiving about the hierarchy between himself and Eve can be approved or dismissed by Adam's free choice, according to him, at least. The senses are responsible for representing reality, and Reason is responsible for organizing the experience of the senses into rational thought and testing them for truth. In disclosing to Raphael "what inward thence I feel" and recounting his sensory perceptions of Eve and his instincts toward her, Adam is attempting to engage openly in that process, putting forth various hypotheses to attempt to decode the meaning and truth of his feelings. But Raphael's admonition to Adam seems to separate sense from reason in a way that frustrates Adam and puts him on the defensive in his own rebuke of Raphael. Raphael's advice for Adam to avoid attributing more is solid, even somewhat prescient, but it misses the mark in terms of warning Adam because Raphael cannot fully comprehend Adam's feelings.

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that critical debate, see chapter five of Kristin Pruitt's *Gender and the Power of Relationship.* It is perhaps relevant to state that there is little to suggest that Eve is fallen at this point since she does not definitively make any kind of free choice in a dream manipulated by Satan. As Kristin Pruitt also notes, Eve is innocent, relieved at waking from and horrified at remembering her Satanic vision (101). Yet the dream does foreshadow and closely parallel her fall, and Satan is already attempting to manipulate her subordinate position to Adam in offering her ascension to the status of a god, a subject we will explore more carefully as it relates to Eve's Book IX temptation scene.

His conversation with Raphael in Book VIII is an important turning point for Adam that foreshadows his own eventual fall, just as Eve's dream in Book IV parallels and foreshadows the temptation she will encounter from Satan. There are a few notable similarities between the scene surround Eve's dream and Adam's discourse with Raphael in Book VIII. Both, obviously, end with an Adamic account of Reason and free will, seeming assurances that, despite their exposure to a temptation of sorts, the critical choice to fall has not yet been made. For instance, the beginning of Book VIII opens with the narrator explaining that the angel "So charming left his voice that he a while / Thought him still speaking, still stood fixed to hear, / Then as new waked thus gratefully replied" (8.2–4). An otherworldly presence speaking in Adam's ear and causing him to go into a dream-like trance from which he must be waked recalls Satan's designs on Eve, as Christopher Crosbie also notes (248).[23] This suggests the conversation with Raphael is a similar moment of foreshadowing for Adam, who will eventually fall by following Eve's wish that he should eat the apple, despite his better judgement. In doing so, he follows his natural, as opposed to his divinely ordained, link to Eve and allows her to act as his head, the very act that Raphael is attempting to warn Adam against. Significantly, the otherworldly presence speaking to Adam in this case is not Satan but Raphael. Raphael is not malicious nor are his intentions bad, but his mission to warn Adam and Eve is compromised by the ontological difference between them.

[23] Crosbie makes the additional observation with which I agree that the sweetness of Raphael's voice and his fine rhetoric "facilitates the future insinuations by Satan," who promises to lift the restrictions on knowledge Raphael places on Adam; in this way, Raphael's warnings become a "precursor to transgression" (249).

Because of the differences in their modes of being, Raphael's attempt to warn Adam is rather ineffective since he constantly skirts around the doubts and suspicions plaguing Adam in his observations of nature's disproportions, allowing the doubts these observations create to continue. Additionally, his misunderstanding of Adam and Eve's sensory relationship distorts his ultimate message to refrain from inverting the marriage hierarchy, and his admonitions to avoid passion makes the natural, sensory relationship between Adam and Eve an object of suspicion and a source of temptation in itself. Adam and Raphael's discourse thus portrays a prelapsarian world in which all creatures must negotiate conflicting observations, misunderstandings, philosophical uncertainty, and difficult to understand power structures using a combination of faith and reason; they may be sufficient and able to do so, as Milton is careful to emphasize elsewhere, but it is not necessarily easy, despite Adam and Eve's tendencies toward good. This makes Adam and Eve's life and fall in Paradise understandable, which is a prerequisite for Milton's ability to explain it to readers.

CHAPTER THREE

Even in a perfect world, Adam and Eve do have the potential to go astray, either through manipulation or through their own mistaken ideas about the world around them, and it is primarily Book IX that shows the results of those mistakes in judgement. This chapter will cover most of Book IX, focusing particularly on Adam and Eve's separation and Eve's temptation. The scene where Adam and Eve separate in the beginning of Book IX shows the prelapsarian first humans making high-stakes decisions about philosophically important and uncertain topics, such as the nature of temptation, and their decision-making process is entwined in the social structures they find themselves in. While they do not fall at this point, this context is important for understanding the process of the fall, which is similarly embedded in flawed philosophical conclusions by two people attempting to navigate their hierarchical political and social realm. In his temptation of Eve, Satan takes advantage of the uncertainty surrounding Eve's position on the gender hierarchy, promising her ascension and certainty. Furthermore, by manipulating and exploiting her senses, he crafts a new natural philosophical system with an accompanying moral system and theodicy that sanctifies her decision to eat the fruit, revealing the way in which natural philosophy and religious ethics are intertwined and the way that interpenetration can be used to negative ends by unsuspecting readers of the world. In order to do so, Satan relies on the language of the new science. Additionally, Adam's fall as a result of his prioritization of his natural bond with Eve is in many ways a fulfillment of his combined inquiry into the heavens and the gender hierarchy. The continued connection of natural philosophy and science to social disruption

indicates Milton's skepticism of the power of knowledge through sensory perception alone to bring humans to a perfect state.

Adam and Eve's Separation

In order to better contextualize the Fall, it is valuable to first look to the separation scene between Adam and Eve in Book IX, which leads to Eve's isolation in the first place. This scene exhibits the extent to which Adam and Eve's decision-making process is shaped by the social and political systems and discourses in which they are engaged, and it reveals the complexity and difficulty of prelapsarian decision making. The separation scene continues to be influenced by Adam's conversation with Raphael in Book VIII. As I suggested in the last chapter, Raphael's message to Adam to exercise self-esteem so Eve will "to realities yield all her shows" assumes that Adam's superiority is a natural result of an essential difference (8.575). Raphael encourages Adam to base his perception of Eve on "self-esteem grounded on just and right / Well managed" (8.571–573). The exercise of self-esteem to avoid straying from the flock, so to speak, is an idea Milton espouses in *The Reason of Church Government,* where he classifies it as a type of shame "whereby men bear an inward reverence toward their own person" and thus monitor their own virtue (680).[24] Thus, Raphael suggests Adam must attend to his own virtue in terms of his position over Eve, and in order to do so, he must maintain reverence for himself. While Adam's response indicates his belief that Raphael misunderstood his reaction to Eve, Adam also receives affirmation from Raphael that Eve's inferiority is grounded in "reality," or is a result of

[24] The references to *The Reason of Church Government* in this chapter come from Merritt Hughes's *Complete Poems and Major Prose* because it has a larger selection of this particular piece than Loewenstein's *John Milton: Prose.*

natural rather than positive law, and that Adam only needs to exercise his headship more efficiently for that to become clear.

But, as Rogers notes, it is unclear whether Eve's inferiority is a result of natural or divine positive right, instituted specifically as a result of the marriage edict. Raphael also exists "in a space of unknowing" (Crosbie 249), and he may not have any clear idea of how different Adam and Eve are ontologically. It is notable that Adam's language to Eve shifts in Book IX, immediately after his conversation with Raphael. In Book IV, Adam tends to emphasize his and Eve's mutuality, and Eve, her own subjection. In Book IV, Adam addresses her as "sole partner and sole part of all these joys (4.411). He asserts that God "made us and for us this ample world" (4.413), indicating their shared participation in and dominion over the Earth. Furthermore, God left the tree

> The only sign of obedience left
>
> Among so many signs of pow'r and rule
>
> Conferred *upon us* and dominion giv'n
>
> Over all other creatures. (4.429–431)

Eve and Adam are given joint pow'r and rule. He describes their shared labor as "our delightful task" (4.625), and they seem to exist in a world without a gendered division of labor.

While Eve largely praises Adam in Book IV, she is more likely to speak in terms of "I" and "thou," emphasizing their status as not a singular unit but as two individuals in a

hierarchical relationship, as Herman notes (135).[25] She is also more likely than Adam to emphasize the differences between their respective roles, stating she has "So far the happier lot, enjoying thee / Preëminent by so much odds while thou / Like consort to thyself canst nowhere find (4.446–448). Later, she puts Adam's account of only one command into question as a result of her emphasis on his preeminence: "My author and disposer, what thou bidst / Unargued, I obey: so God ordains. / God is thy law, thou mine" (4.635–637). The use of "ordain'd" indicates Eve's "obligation to obey Adam arises from a divine, presumably arbitrary, ordination issued, we have to assume, *after* her creation" (Rogers 123). Furthermore, it indicates Adam's ability to make any number of positive laws, if he wishes, since he is her appointed head; the one positive law may govern Adam, but another and potentially many more govern Eve. Book IV shows the hierarchy between Adam and Eve running smoothly, with both parties praising one another and worshipping God in harmony (4.720–735). But the scene also sets up a strange uncertainty and confusion about the relative extent of hierarchy and mutuality, and the subtle interplay between the two that Kristin Pruitt admires in *Gender and the Power of Relationship* ultimately proves unstable if not totally untenable.

This instability becomes somewhat apparent in Book IX, where Adam and Eve's words toward each other differ from their language in Book IV. At the beginning of Book IX, for the first time in *Paradise Lost,* Eve speaks before Adam to suggest that they separate to fulfill the day's work, saying, "Let us divide our labors, thou where choice / Leads thee or

[25] It's relevant to note that, while I make use of Herman's analysis of the instability of the gender hierarchy in Paradise, I do not agree with him on one fundamental issue, namely that Adam is displeased with Eve even before the Fall. I interpret his words about Eve to mean quite the opposite.

where most needs" (9.214–215). Eve taking the initiative here contrasts with the deference she affords Adam in Book IV, where he plans the next day's labors before Eve's remarks, "What thou bidst / Unargued I obey" (4.635–636). In a speech recalling Adam's account of "branches overgrown / That mock our scant manuring" (4.627–628), Eve notes that "what we by day / Lop overgrown or prune or prop or bind / One night or two with wanton growth derides" (9.209–210). They work more slowly when they are together as "looks intervene and smiles or object new / Casual discourse draw on which intermits / Our day's work" (9.222–224).

While her solution is novel, the problem Eve recognizes is one that Adam has commented on before. Eve's suggestion is coming from an eminently reasonable place, a place that prioritizes the effectiveness of their labor. Her suggestion also makes sense in light of Adam's assertion that "man hath his daily work of body or mind / Appointed which declares his dignity" (4.618–619). If Adam and Eve are slacking in their work, or if they are becoming distracted and idle like the other animals that "rove idle unemployed" (4.616), Eve's solution maintains the dignity of their labor. But Adam disagrees with Eve about the necessity of splitting up. Adam's response to Eve's concern about their waning capacity to work is that their labor should not exclude "food of the mind or this sweet intercourse / Of looks and smiles, for smiles from reason flow, / To brute denied" (9.238–240). While Eve's claim is reasonable, he assures her that they are in no danger of losing the dignity of their labor, even if it is not as efficient as possible, as long as they maintain their love. The issue of their responsibility to the tending of the Garden and to each other showcases a discussion

between two people, both reasonable but with different views of the ethical implications of their actions.

Adam's response praises Eve, but it also seems to take some of Raphael's suggestion of greater self-esteem to heart, with Adam emphasizing his separate status as husband and head to a greater extent than in previous speeches. As a result, Adam and Eve's discussion shifts away from the issue of labor efficiency and toward the much touchier realm of gendered hierarchy. Adam praises Eve's consideration of efficiency saying, "Nothing lovelier can be found / In woman than to study household good / And good works in her husband promote" (9.232–234). Here he implies a gendered division of labor at the heart of Eve's request when, as Herman notes, there is no indication that was Eve's intention (147). Even after counteracting her concerns about their efficiency, Adam says he would still be willing to part with Eve, if she so wished, if Satan were not loose in the garden. In doing so, he once again emphasizes gender disparity and now his status as the one who was made first:

> Leave not the faithful side
>
> That gave thee being, still shades thee and protects!
>
> The wife where danger or dishonor lurks
>
> Safest and seemliest by her husband stays
>
> Who guards her or with her the worse endures. (9.267–269)

Adam is not directly exercising his supposed husbandly authority, or creating a positive law, but he is attempting to clarify his position as head. The claim that he might be able to protect

Eve seems to be a practice in Raphael's call to self-esteem; he is putting himself in a hypothetical situation where Eve would require his leadership or his partnership. In doing so, he shies away from the language of mutuality he usually employs with her.

Eve responds with injury "as one who loves and some unkindness meets" (9.271). Judging by her submissive language in the past books, Eve is keenly aware of the gender hierarchy long before this point, but here she hears evidence for the first time that Adam is also keenly aware of it. Furthermore, from her perspective, he perhaps believes whatever gap lies between them to be natural rather than stemming from Eve's willingness to submit or to God's command and potentially grounded in an ontological difference large enough to make her too weak to withstand Satan's temptation. She espouses her injury at Adam's

> Fear that my firm faith and love
>
> Can by his fraud be shaken or seduced!—
>
> Thoughts which, how found they harbor in thy breast,
>
> Adam, misthought of her to thee so dear. (9.286–289)

While Adam does make a good point about Satan's presence in the garden compromising their safety, Eve's response indicates that she believes his lack of faith in her to be the central point of his speech as "all she hears is Adam's denigration of how much she knows and the quality of her faith" (Herman 147). Here Eve feels her own perceived insufficiency, perhaps in a way that Adam as the one above her in the hierarchy cannot understand, and Satan takes advantage of this unstable hierarchical order—the burdens of which he knows well—in order to facilitate the Fall.

What follows Eve's offense is a discussion of the ethical implications of temptation in which both Adam and Eve make rational and Miltonic arguments in a way that evinces both Eve's rational sufficiency and the intricacies of prelapsarian decision-making. Adam attempts to assure Eve that he is "not diffident" of her capabilities but wishes to avoid temptation altogether since "he who tempts, though in vain, at least asperses / The tempted with dishonor foul, supposed / Not incorruptible of faith" (9.296–298). Moreover, Adam attempts to clarify to Eve that the aid he hopes for is mutual, despite his initial emphasis on his protective power. He tells Eve, "[do not] think superfluous others' aid: / I from the influence of thy looks receive / Access in every virtue" (9.308–310). In Eve's presence, he is "more wise, more watchful, strong" since "shame thou look on/ (Shame to be overcome or overreached) / Would utmost vigor raise and, raised, unite" (9.311–314). The language Adam uses is that of Milton's *Reason of Church Government,* in which Milton notes that "it was thought of old in philosophy that shame, or to call it better, the reverence of our elders, our brethren, and friends, was the greatest incitement to virtuous deeds and the greatest dissuasion from unworthy attempts that might be" (679). Adam's focus is on a communal, and ultimately still quite mutual, handling of their potential temptation.

Eve's response is shaped by the previous "unkindness" she meets, causing her to take a different, if still Miltonic, stance. Although Adam attempted to use "healing words" and smooth over his offense (9.290), Eve still "thought / Less attributed to her faith sincere" (9.319–321). Although the text may present us with "two individuals capable of resisting the serpent's stratagems, were reason alone sufficient," as Pruitt claims (262), other motivations and doubts have also clearly impacted their discourse. Eve goes on to tell Adam,

If this be our condition thus to dwell

In narrow circuit straitened by a foe

Subtle or violent, we not endued

Single with like defence wherever met,

How are we happy, still in fear of harm? (9.322–326)

According to Eve, Adam's fear of Satan, a fear based on her perceived lesser faith, restricts Adam and Eve's liberties, confining them and limiting their freedom. The attempt of temptation "sticks no dishonor on our front but turns / Foul on himself! Then wherefore shunned or feared / But us who rather double honor gain" (9.331–333). Furthermore, she argues, "what is faith, love, virtue unassayed, / Alone, without exterior help sustained?" (9.335–336). The individualism she emphasizes in her words recalls Raphael's earlier account of Abdiel's heroic proof of faith from within Satan's legions of rebellious angels.[26] Eve's approach to temptation is focused on using it as an opportunity to refine her virtue and prove her faith before "Heav'n, our witness" (9.334). As McColley notes, Eve's answer to Adam also has Miltonic reasoning to back it up, since it is "a succinct compendium of *Areopagitica*" (*Milton's Eve* 172), where Milton writes, "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary" (*Areopagitica* 193).[27] Eve's answer is eminently reasonable and intellectual, both addressing

[26] Abdiel is originally part of the legions that turn against God, but he alone chooses to confront Satan and leave the rebellion, "faithful found / Among the faithless, faithful only he / Among innumerable false" (6.896–897).

[27] Eve's emphasis on the individual nature of this proof of virtue also echoes other works of Milton in which he portrays a lone voice of truth and faithfulness. In his fiction, it recalls the Lady of *Comus* who defends chastity against the evil reasonings of Comus, and in his prose it recalls Milton himself, who often takes on the stance of

Adam's points and emphasizing her own capacity to match his skill in reason. While Milton's advice in *Areopagitica* applies to a distinctly fallen world, the echo of its application to both Adam and Eve emphasizes the care with which they must make decisions and the potential for those decisions to be disastrous.

By placing his own words at different times in the mouth of both Adam and Eve, Milton paints a picture of the first pair as reasonable and thoughtful, "complexly and deeply human" in a situation that has no clear answer (McColley, *Milton's Eve* 169). Eve's capacity to reason has been skirted around and subordinated to her submissiveness to Adam up until this point, but the argument that Eve will yield to "realities" if Adam exercises more self-esteem seems to be put into doubt by this particular conflict, in which he attempts to do just that, potentially putting Eve's natural equality in conflict with divine positive right. Eve's offense at Adam's perceived suggestion of her insufficiency certainly colors her response and her feelings toward temptation, and her language suggests she feels she has something more to prove than Adam. Far from minimizing the separation scene to a lover's spat, however, the background of Raphael and Adam's recent conversation and the difficulty of negotiating an unclear and potentially arbitrary hierarchical order shows their discussion to be deeply embedded in the social structures that impact their relationship to each other. More like than unlike their postlapsarian counterparts, Adam and Eve attempt to negotiate the complexities of a confusing world and make positive decisions when the right thing to do is unclear. We see in the separation scene not only a tension around the vague nature of Adam and Eve's

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the lone voice of truth in a sea of the unfaithful. Because of Milton's prose works in particular, Abdiel has sometimes been seen as a sort of biographical placeholder for Milton. For a more fleshed out analysis of these parallels, see chapter 6 of Quint's *Inside* Paradise Lost.

hierarchical relationship but also the rich difficulties of Adam and Eve's decision-making process.

The Temptation of Adam and Eve

Adam ultimately sanctions Eve's departure from him after giving her an almost prescient warning:

> Reason is free, and reason he made right
>
> But bid her well beware and still erect
>
> Lest by some fair appearing good surprised
>
> She dictate false and misinform the will
>
> To do what God expressly hath forbid. (9.352–356)

Just as Adam cautions, Eve's reason is overcome by surprise and deception. Satan's method of temptation from within the body of a snake is intent on extorting the limits of Eve's perception through surprise by introducing a seemingly natural object with no apparent explanation. This allows Satan to craft his own explanation, steeped in the discourse of the new science, that undoes what Eve has previously believed through faith about the tree and her role in the Garden. Satan also exploits the hierarchical instabilities in the Garden, promising Eve ascension. Thus, the language and perversion of natural philosophy play an integral role in the destruction of the Edenic hierarchy through Eve's disobedience.

It is relevant to note that Satan does not simply happen upon the serpent and decide to possess it. Rather, he chooses that animal in particular after long contemplation and

observation of various animals on Earth. He is presented as an explorer who "roamed / With narrow search and with inspection deep / Considered every creature" (9.82–84). He picks the serpent "subtlest beast of all the field" only "after long debate irresolute" (9.86–87). The snake is the "fit vessel, fittest imp of fraud" because "in the wily snake / Whatever sleights none would suspicious mark, / As from his wit and native subtlety" (9.89; 91–93). His observation of the animals is pointedly instrumental, not carried out for the sake of wonder or extended knowledge. It is necessary for him to understand the nature of the animals and follow that to make his deceit all the more successful. Francis Bacon, a major figure in the new science, writes in *Novum Organum*, "nature to be commanded must be obeyed" (Bacon 47). Environmental historian and philosopher Carolyn Merchant interprets Bacon to mean that "one must understand the causes of nature in order to understand and use its effects" (737), a concept that Satan seems to understand well. The effectiveness of Satan's manipulation of nature and Eve's perception of nature relies on his knowledge and submission to the nature of the very animal he possesses.

Satan's method of possessing the serpent is also mysterious. Although Raphael explains that angels can "limn themselves and color, shape or size / Assume as likes them best, condense or rare" (6.352–353), Satan does not just appear as a snake but actually possesses the body of the snake: "In at his mouth / The Devil entered and his brutal sense / In heart or head possessing soon inspired" (6.187–188). The idea that the thinner essences of the angels might make actual possession of corporeal forms possible is nowhere else hinted at, nor are the mechanisms by which Satan accomplishes this feat clear. It is summed up as an "act intelligential" (9.190). There is something of the magical and the occult in Satan's

possession of the serpent, which is the result of demonic intervention. Satan is concerned his essence will be "mixed with bestial slime" (9.165), indicating there is some kind of natural and material interaction at work in his possession of the serpent, but the status of the act as "intelligential" recalls Raphael's language in Book V, where he states that angels can eat: "food alive those pure / Intelligential substances require / As doth your rational" (5.406–408).[28] The act is a result of a different kind of being from Adam and Eve, as I explain in chapter one, and thus the knowledge of how it is achieved is perhaps out of reach for Milton and for the first humans, which is the point of Satan's assault in the first place. Thus, a possessed serpent, capable of speech, acts far enough outside Eve's realm of experience that it serves to fundamentally destabilize her previous conceptions of the natural world, while the appearance of the snake, as the subtlest beast, serves to avoid Satan's detection from within the serpent.

Eve knows from her interaction with animals that they are not endued with human language at creation, but hearing the serpent speak seems to contradict that knowledge, and, although she knows how to interact with animals and serpents generally, she now has to figure out how to react and interact with this specific serpent. After Satan addresses Eve in the guise of the serpent Eve's initial response to Satan's voice, including his flattery, is—as Satan expects—to question the cause, unknowingly giving Satan a chance to exercise his rhetorical prowess in giving an answer. Eve asks, upon hearing the serpent speak, "What may this mean?" She had thought language "denied / To beasts whom God on their creation-day /

[28] As Bruce Moran notes, the divide between what was considered "occult" or the superstitious and what was available for scientific inquiry was much less defined in the seventeenth century (2). The two are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Created mute to all articulate sound" (9.555–557). She demurs on whether or not animals have any sort of reason or language, unable to give a definitive answer on the issue of animal consciousness, but she notes that "in their looks / Much reason and in their actions oft appears" (9.558–559).[29] Eve cannot access their embodied experience or rely on the appearance of human reason in their actions and looks, and this is one uncertainty that Satan attempts to fill in with false knowledge in his temptation.

The explanation that Satan gives is indebted to the language of the new science, and, in its offer of immediate and solitary ascension, it also addresses and puts pressure on Eve's lower hierarchical position in the Garden. He claims that he was, like other animals who eat "the trodden herb," "of abject thoughts and low, / As was my food, nor aught but food discerned, / Or sex, and apprehended nothing high" (8.572–574). He begins by relating his reasoning capacities as a serpent, filling his account with knowledge that Eve seems to lack and connecting his previously lowly status to the food he eats. After eating the apple,

> To speculations high or deep
>
> I turned my thoughts and with capacious mind
>
> Considered all things visible in heav'n
>
> Or earth or middle, all things fair and good. (9.602–605)

[29] It is really only relevant to note Eve's experience with the animals in this context. This is not the first we hear of animal language in *Paradise Lost.* In Book VIII, Adam recounts God asking him why he is lonely in the company of the animals, saying, "Know'st thou not / Their language and their ways? They also know / And reason not contemptibly" (8.372–374). It is difficult to say if Adam has a better understanding of the animals than Eve or what it would mean if he does, and that question alone could likely set up a separate chapter in a new thesis, but what primarily concerns me here is Eve's stated relationship to animals in the text.

In Satan's account, a snake has moved away from his lowly diet and thus obtained powers of reasoning beyond what he previously thought possible. The idea of food being related to one's place on the chain of being is not necessarily new to Eve considering Raphael's words to Eve in Book V on the universe's digestive processes. When Adam and Eve ascend to a more ethereal state of being, they will dine with angels "and find / No inconvenient diet nor too light fare" (5.495). However, Raphael says Adam and Eve will only ascend "if ye be found obedient and retain / Unalterably firm His love entire / Whose progeny you are" (5.500–502). Satan's claims for the effects of the fruit (ascension obtained through knowledge) clearly parallels and distorts Raphael's claims for the effects of obedience and continued virtue (ascension obtained through virtue), perverting Raphael's digestive promises.

Thus, Satan begins to associate the fruit with knowledge, seemingly giving a firsthand account of its effects on him, the proof of which rests in his very words to her. This engages Eve's curiosity enough that although she tells him, "thy overpraising leaves in doubt / The virtue of that fruit in thee first proved" (9.615–616), she agrees to follow him to the tree. Her faith seems to stand strong at first; she knows eating the fruit is wrong, no matter what its properties may or may not be (9.649–651). But this only gives Satan the opportunity to redouble his efforts, using all his significant powers of oration and persuasion. He "as to passion moved / Fluctuates disturbed, yet comely" (9.668). His temptation is both visual and rhetorical, affecting as many of Eve's senses as possible before she touches and tastes the fruit.

He goes on to solidify the connection between the fruit and knowledge in the following lines, specifically referencing (and perverting) natural philosophical discourse.

O sacred, wise, and wisdom-giving plant,

Mother of science, now I feel thy pow'r

Within me clear not only to discern

Things in their causes but to trace the ways

Of highest agents deemed however wise! (9.679–683)

Satan takes his initial claim a step further by asserting he has obtained the ability to contemplate the heavens, telling Eve that he is now able to "discern / Things in their causes" and "trace the ways / Of highest agents." Through a winding logical train, he crafts a polytheistic world with a jealous God, concluding that God cannot possibly be just to keep such fruit from humans: "Why then was this forbid? Why but to awe, / Why but to keep ye low and ignorant / His worshippers" (9.702–704). He promises that, since he has become as rational as a human, Eve will become wiser in proportion, arguing, "I of brute human, ye of human gods" (9.713).

The temptation scene is embroiled in the language of the seventeenth-century debate around natural philosophy and empiricism, in which the new philosophy was attempting to reform methods of gaining knowledge. In *The Great Instauration*—named for Bacon's work advocating for experimental methods—historian Charles Webster describes the conflict between experimental philosophers who called for a greater focus on inductive methods and

those who ascribed to scholasticism and older versions of natural philosophy, which tended to be based on deductive reasoning. New natural philosophers must make observations and "submit nature to the trials and vexations of art" through experimentation and the use of technology, rather than reasoning from abstract, ancient, universal truths (Webster 338). Satan pointedly calls the tree the "mother of science," and promises Eve the knowledge of "the causes of things," of a definitive natural philosophy. This echoes Webster's account of the ultimate end of the new scientific project, which is "perfect knowledge of the inner workings of nature" (337). Although his claims are false, Satan's language seems to be rooted in a form of empiricism.[30] He provides his own appearance as visible, tangible evidence of the power of the fruit, and he tells Eve that angels and gods are not as powerful as they seem, saying, "this fair earth I see / Warmed by the sun producing every kind, / Them nothing" (9.720–722). God's powers of creation and the consequences of picking the fruit must be taken on faith, but Satan provides an alternative that is seemingly rooted in evidence (false evidence, but we'll get to that in a moment). What he sells to her through the framework of natural philosophy is an enhanced version of Eden without uncertainty or doubt, and she sits at the top of the hierarchical chain, if, and only if, she will eat the fruit. He exploits the areas in which Eve has least knowledge and the areas where she might feel herself most wanting (hierarchical position, for example).

Satan's manipulations of the social hierarchy and the conditions of Eden, paired with his sensory deceptions, are extremely effective, and it soon becomes apparent how much Eve

[30] This is not the word that Milton himself would have used since it was not in usage in this form at the time, but it is appropriate to describe Satan's emphasis on sensory evidence.

has bought into the new worldview Satan is peddling. Eve's doubt in Satan's claims are now completely gone, as she says to the fruit, "Great are thy virtues, doubtless" (9.745). Before, God's ban on the fruit was evidence that eating it would bring negative effects, but now "His forbidding / Commends thee more while it infers the good / By thee communicated and our want" (9.753–755). The framework shifts the meaning of the evidence itself. Because she now takes the virtue of the fruit for granted, God becomes an envious God to her mind, hoarding knowledge.[31] When Eve finally grabs and partakes of the fruit, she thinks it more delicious than any fruit she has ever tasted "through expectation high / Of knowledge, nor was the godhead from her thought" (9.789–790). Immediately, Eve believes herself to feel the effects of the fruit she expected, saying to the tree "I grow mature / In knowledge as the gods who all things know (9.803–804). The language of natural philosophy and the new science persists, with Eve showing reverence toward the "sciential sap" of the tree (9.837). Furthermore, after praising the knowledge-giving power of the tree, Eve praises "experience," saying "experience next, to thee I owe, / Best guide. Not foll'wing thee, I had remained / In ignorance" (9.806–808). Experience was a vital basis for the new science, which emphasized the need "to relate natural philosophy to its natural roots in experience" as opposed to tradition (Webster 338). Karen Edwards also notes in *Milton and the Natural*

[31]Furthermore, she should not be afraid of death since the serpent "hath eat'n and lives / and knows, and speaks, and reasons and discerns" (9.764–765). Satan also attempts to ease Eve's concerns about death in other ways through a misleading and circular train of logic, which he ends by saying, "Your fear itself of death removes the fear!" since God would not create something fearful or punish her for simply attempting to know good from evil, thereby removing the possibility of death (9.698).

World that, in this context, "experience" is likely interchangeable with "experiment," and the phrase "unmistakably gestures toward the new, or experimental philosophy" (Edwards 16).[32]

Furthermore, the violation of the edict to avoid the fruit on the Tree of Knowledge is linked to promises of ascension, and it becomes linked with the perversion of the other positive right in the Garden, the gender hierarchy. After eating the fruit herself, Eve debates with herself whether to share the fruit with Adam or

> Keep the odds of knowledge in my pow'r
>
> Without copartner so to add what wants
>
> In female sex, the more to draw his love
>
> And render me more equal and, perhaps,
>
> A thing not undesirable, sometime
>
> Superior: for inferior who is free? (9.820–825)

While Sumers writes that Eve's wish to become "more equal" implies that "before the fall, she already possesses the 'equal' station and the personal freedom she desires" (206), to craft such a reading, one must skip over Eve's desire "to add what wants / In female sex, the more to draw his love." Eve may be asking for something more than equality, to be "superior," but that desire clearly comes from her formerly inferior position; she is not making a comment

[32] This is a fairly standard position, and debates tend to center around what the implications of this are. The words "experience" and "experiment" are interchangeable at this time, though "experiment" was beginning to gesture more clearly toward the new experimental philosophy a.k.a. the new science (Moran 63, 131; Levere 20).

on humankind's lack—their "want"—but only her perception of the female sex's lower status. Through her consumption of the fruit, she has now taken that status into her own hands, recalling Satan's words: "[I life] more perfect have attained than fate / Meant me by vent'ring higher than my lot" (9.689–690). According to Rogers, Milton places relations in Paradise on a shaky hierarchical foundation "in order to justify the fact of the fall on a perfect world" (Rogers 125). Thus, Milton makes inequality a factor explaining the fall because the divine marriage edict makes Eve particularly vulnerable to promises of hierarchical ascension.

The issue of hierarchy impacts Eve's temptation of Adam and Adam's eventual decision to fall as well, and Adam's observations of disproportions in the heavens and his associated uncertainty about his position in the hierarchy are important background for his Fall. Adam is not fooled into thinking Eve has attained higher knowledge and immediately expresses horror at her fall, saying "How art thou lost, how on a sudden lost, / Defaced, deflow'red, and now to death devote?" (9.900–901). Yet he chooses to follow her to death, disregarding marriage as positive right and treating it as unbreakable natural law, now that the two for the first time exist totally at odds. He claims he could not think to lose Eve, even if it means he must die, because, "I feel / The link of nature draw me, flesh of flesh" (911–912). The words recall his notion in Book VIII that "nature failed in me and left some part / Not proof enough to such object to sustain" (8.534–535). This initial observation about perceived disproportions in the marriage hierarchy was prompted by, or at least paired and linked with, scientific inquiry as well. The tension and uncertainty about how to navigate a mysterious and difficult-to-understand hierarchy and Adam's observations about the heavens

are both involved in the upending of God's injunction(s) to Adam and Eve. As Rogers notes, in prioritizing the natural law, intuited by his strong sensual affinity for Eve and his observations of her, he allows Eve to convince him to eat the fruit and upend the marriage hierarchy. Thus, "Feeling the natural, rather than the divinely ordained, aspect of marriage to be dominant, Adam finds it impossible to separate himself from Eve" (Rogers 120).

Science and the Fall

Thus, Milton places the language of the new science in the mouths of Satan and the fallen Eve. In part because he does so, Milton was at one time thought to be rather scientifically backwards (Edwards 3).[33] But it is also important to note the ways that Satan and Eve both pervert the methods of the new science. Satan does not suggest an increase in knowledge through the gradual collection and interpretation of individual observations from the natural world, as Bacon and other new philosophers do (Moran 133). Rather, he promises knowledge instantaneously in the eating of the fruit, which takes on the characteristics of an occult object.[34] According to Edwards in *Milton and the Natural World*, this aligns him more closely with a mountebank or a snake-oil salesman promising Eve an easy universal cure and

[33] Although I do not specifically address it here, Rogers's *The Matter of Revolution* is seminal in showcasing Milton's awareness and integration of contemporary scientific and natural philosophical theories. Milton's backwardness is by no means the current critical consensus.

[34] Satan's appearance as a serpent, it may be important to note, may open doors to Eve's belief in the occult by challenging the consistency of the natural order she once knew; also, his possession of the serpent is by no means more logical or understandable from the human perspective than the alleged properties of the fruit. This is one reason that Edwards and Picciotto always strike me as slightly unfair in their evaluation of Eve as a failed experimental philosopher. According to Edwards, if Eve had "properly valued her own experience of the natural world, she would not have been led astray by the marvelous talking serpent" (*Milton and the Natural World* 39). While this analysis holds value, the emphasis always tends to be on Eve's laziness, when I think that oversimplifies the ingenuity of Satan's approach and conveniently glosses over how, exactly, she should have arrived at the conclusion that Satan has taken over the body of an animal.

offering anecdotal evidence of its effectiveness (26). Furthermore, Eve's experience is something like a placebo effect, built not on any actual property of the fruit but on her expectations of the fruit's virtue. Because of this perversion, an increasing number of critics, like Joanna Picciotto and Karen Edwards, have overcome the negative connotations on the surface of Book IX to read Milton in favor of experimental science in compelling ways.

While I agree that Satan perverts the language of scientific inquiry to his own end, I do not argue that Milton wholly embraces the new science. Satan's assurance that Eve's current condition in relation to the natural world is in drastic need of reform by means of expanded knowledge, Satan's utilization of Baconian methods to catalogue the natural world, and the replacement of obedience and virtue with knowledge as the means to ascension still potentially reflect negatively on the new science.[35] The subject of Milton's epic lends itself well to commentary on seventeenth-century science since the Garden of Eden was a potent symbol for the new philosophy. Bacon describes in *The Great Instauration* "the restoration of the powers mankind had lost in the Fall, and his descendants in the Royal Society accepted this as a founding myth" (Armstrong 51). The new science promised re-entry to the Garden and a recovery of prelapsarian senses and dominion over nature, characterized specifically by the knowledge of nature. The promise of Edenic return resembles Satan's attempts to persuade Eve that access to a higher mode of perception will bring ascension, placing her beyond nature's power. The new philosophy admitted lust for knowledge to be a primary

[35] In *Engendering the Fall,* Shannon Miller further argues that Eve's reference to her fall as a "sad experiment" later in the text makes it difficult to argue for "a positive, or even ambivalent, treatment of experimental philosophy in the poem" because "experiment" was becoming increasingly associated with the new science, particularly the experiments of Robert Boyle and other members of the Royal Society (Miller 161–162). Miller also makes compelling claims about Eve's perceived expansion of her senses recalling the use of technology to extend "the domain of the senses," a project embraced by the Royal Society in particular (163).

motivation for the Fall, but Bacon in particular stresses that knowledge of the natural world and its workings is not associated with the kind of superstitious and demonic knowledge Satan promises (Armstrong 51–52). Satan spends as much or more time promising Eve the ability to understand the natural world as the supernatural world in Milton's narrative, and by putting the language of the new natural philosophy in the mouth of Eve and Adam, Milton complicates the rhetoric of the strict separation of the kind of knowledge that results from experimentation and the kind of knowledge that Satan promises Adam and Eve.

It is apparent that the issue of the new natural philosophy in *Paradise Lost*, like most everything Milton addresses in this text, is perhaps more nuanced than simple condemnation or affirmation, and the recognition of that nuance does not necessarily require Milton to be relegated to scientific backwardness. Milton both integrates discoveries and methods of the new philosophy into his texts and expresses concerns about its disruptive potential and the claims to objective observation that characterize it, especially after the Royal Society began to frame their production of knowledge as fundamentally apolitical. The idea of the new philosophy as a sight of recovery for Paradise was important both to the Royal Society and, as historian Charles Webster notes, to radical-thinking millenarian theologians before the Restoration (Webster 12). Webster traces a strong link "between experimental philosophy and spiritual religion in the writings of the reformers" (202). In the *Matter of Revolution,* John Rogers also notes the linkage of radical political thought to corresponding philosophical and scientific systems that seemed to justify particular social or theological structures. Milton similarly portrays Adam, Eve, and Satan as searching for and espousing knowledge that is enmeshed in their social conditions and the political structure surrounding them, and that

knowledge inevitably affects these structures in turn. By having Satan pervert the virtuous ascension chain Raphael posits in Book VIII by replacing virtue with knowledge, and by making such promises integral to what makes the fruit so very tempting to Eve, Milton does seem to be advocating for caution surrounding the Edenic claims of the new science, and he showcases the power of shifts in natural philosophy to disrupt human relationships with each other and with the natural world under false delusions of the unmitigated and unconditional improvement knowledge brings.

Rather than being either backward or reactionary, Milton seems almost to anticipate modern concerns about the way we have come to frame objective knowledge. The over-specification of the Baconian method and its severance from the analysis of the social structures that frame the knowledge it produces has been a bedrock of modern philosophical objections to empiricism as viewing nature as both separate from society and as merely instrumental (Merchant 734). This, some argue, has in turn caused our alienation from nature and contributed to the ecological deterioration of the Earth. In her analysis of Bacon's contribution to the idea of the contained experiment, the two camps Carolyn Merchant identifies in relation to Bacon's role in experimental science are those who wholly condemn the scientific method and Bacon's role in its development as inherently antithetical to any ecologically friendly worldview and those who characterize Bacon as "the humble servant of nature who gave humanity new tools to uncover the truths of nature" (734). This is perhaps a useful analogy for Milton criticism, which often tends to characterize Milton's views of the

new science as either uncritically positive or wholly negative, depending on whether one is reading from a history of science perspective or an ecocritical perspective.[36]

Merchant argues a middle ground can exist between the two extremes that both recognizes Bacon's ideas as having contributed to the eventual improvement of human life through increased knowledge (medical advances, for example) and criticizes the dynamics and language of gendered and ecological power that underlie many of his ideas, often under a veneer of objective truth. Milton perhaps anticipates and occupies that middle ground by holding simple condemnation or approval in suspension, which is why his work functions so well in both ecocritical and experimentalist readings. He brings our attention to the power of the new natural philosophy to disrupt gendered hierarchy because knowledge is inherently embedded in social and political structures, and he questions the potential of knowledge alone to perfect our relationship with God and nature. At the same time, his work interacts with scientific advances of his day and, in his depiction of the natural world, seems to approve of the new natural philosophy as a way to give us a deeper understanding of our environment.

[36] Miller avoids this binary by making Milton's criticisms only about the objective status of knowledge the Royal Society espouses. I avoid and expand the focus of Milton's commentary, in part because of how recent the creation of the Royal Society was at the time of *Paradise Lost*'s publication.

CONCLUSION

Considering the wide range of subjects his epic explores, it is not difficult to view Milton as a natural philosopher, a political theorist, and a theologian as well as a poet. My thesis shows that Milton's *Paradise Lost* engages with multiple disciplines relevant to both his time period and our own, primarily the interconnected ones of gender studies and science. The gender dynamics of Paradise are intertwined with the new science and seventeenth-century debates on how best to gain knowledge. While the new science framed inquiry into nature as a way of mitigating the effects of the human postlapsarian condition, Milton makes curiosity and uncertainty about the natural world a condition of the first humans even before the Fall. Adam's uncertainty about Eve's true position in relation to him is connected to his observation of disproportions in the heavens, which then causes him to question the way nature organizes itself hierarchically. In his temptation of Eve, Satan takes advantage of the connection between scientific inquiry and disruption in hierarchies, particularly ones that might seem mysterious or arbitrary, as he uses the language of the new science and the promise of knowledge to pervert Eve's way of thinking about her world and her place in it. This depiction of natural philosophy does not forbid inquiry but urges caution and careful analysis of the nuances of the social dynamics that inevitably impact and are impacted by scientific inquiry.

Furthermore, Milton's depiction of Eve as both rational and equal and yet submissive and inferior reveals the paradox of their simultaneously mutual and hierarchical relationship to be unstable and difficult to maintain from the perspective of both Adam and Eve. As my first and second chapters show, Adam is constantly in the dark about his real relation to Eve,

and his superior position, in many ways, seems to make him more vulnerable to the moral uncertainty associated with that position. Eve's inferior position makes her ripe for Satan's rhetorical techniques, which have almost always emphasized the perceived injustice of hierarchy. Adam and Eve are both at a heightened vulnerability—although Adam's should be a hypothetical position of power—because they must navigate the hierarchical system in which they are encased. This is not to suggest that Milton intentionally wrote a scathing critique of misogyny, as Herman claims, but it does examine the difficult and fragile power dynamics inherent in the patriarchy.

Paradise Lost remains a cultural force after well over three hundred years, in part because Milton has created a compellingly complex account of a perfect Paradise that is almost strange in its familiarity. His epic is deeply invested in relevant political, theological, and scientific questions, and he creates a Paradise intricate enough to engage with the nuances of those concerns. While Adam and Eve have a more harmonious relationship with the natural world and each other than postlapsarian humans are wont to, according to Milton, they wrestle with the nature of themselves, the world around them, and the nature of knowledge, as their descendants will for millennia.

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BIOGRAPHY

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